SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

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PURE | MERCENARIES 2:
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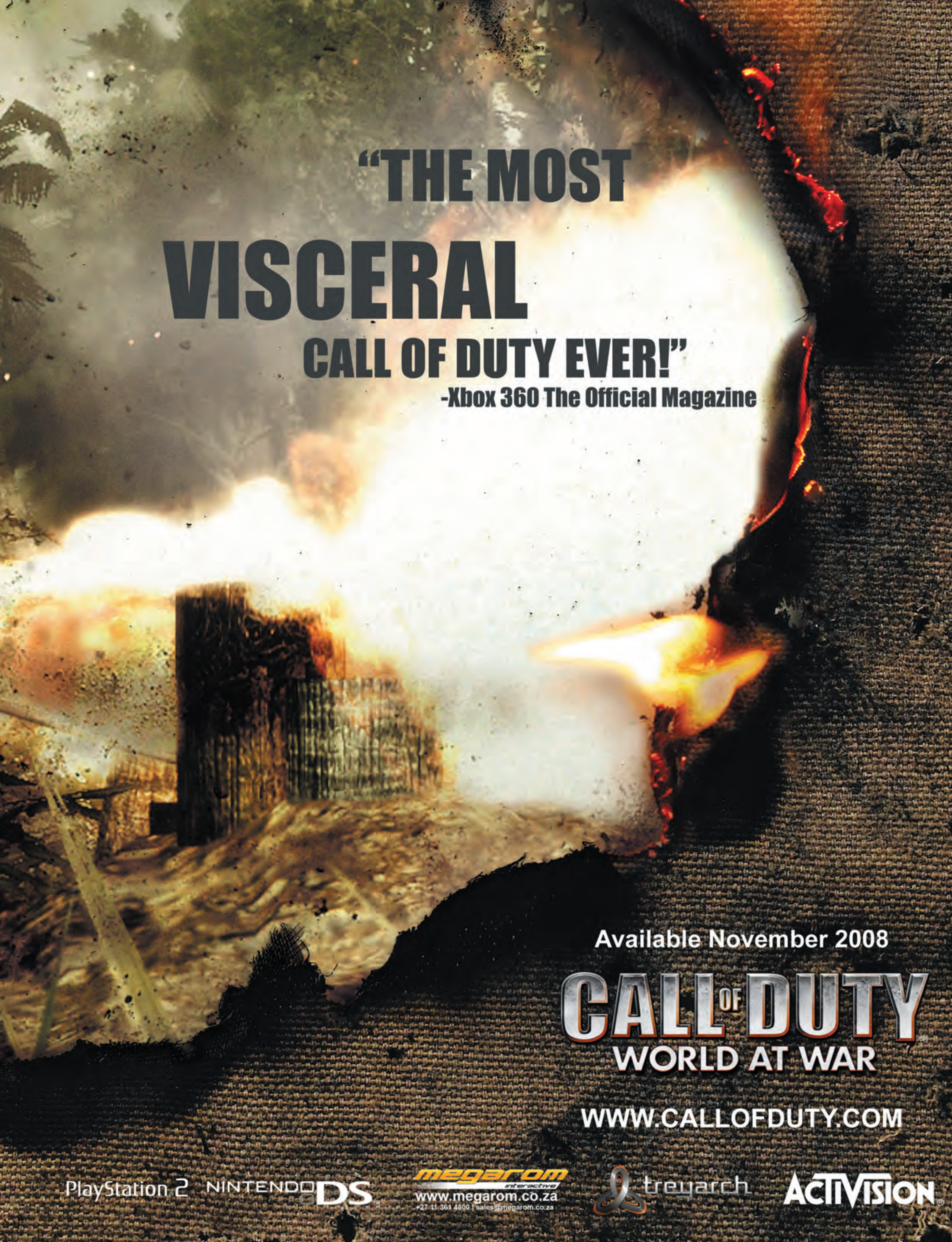

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TOO MANY GAMES

BECAUSE OF ALL THE cool content this month, we had to leave out the mobile and movie sections: they will return soon – fear not. There were just too many games and not enough pages... It's not as if we plan these things – it's all very random here at the office. *NAG* is really a lot like a mad scientist's apocalypse machine. We're always adding things and taking things out on a whim, flicking switches just to see what they do; but more often than not, we just sit here, staring at the blinking lights while they blinkingly blink at us. The bottom line: when our sun-imploding Armageddon device is finally finished, it'll leave galactic secret agents around the universe quivering and drooling into their breakfast cereal.

As you can see, I don't really have much to say this month. I blame this on my rAge 'brain-fry', which only wears off in time for the December issue.

Enjoy this time of the year... it's not often that so many excellent games are released at the same time. I hope you've been saving, because I can think of at least ten must-buy games that'll be released during the next two months.

RAGE IS OVER...

If you visited the show, exhibited at the show or just stood outside and directed the traffic, thank you. rAge was really crazy this year, and in my humble opinion, the best one we've ever done. The attendance figure was up, the *NAG* LAN was up and the number of exhibitors was up. Everything just seemed to come together perfectly. The scary thing is that rAge 2009's planning will start in November already. Each year we keep pulling the planning phase back, because the show is getting more and more complicated to pull off. Lastly, I'd like to thank the rAge management team, staff and all our suppliers. See you next year for the seven-year itch...

DO IT NOW!

Our marketing lady, Jacqui, has just asked me to shamelessly punt the *NAG* T-shirts here, which are available at www.btgames.co.za. Go on, order one! Do it now! For the low, low price of R150, you get a *NAG*-branded T-shirt, made out of 100% cotton, printed on both sides and with a little label on the collar with cleaning instructions. We have a limited number of T-shirts, so order one now. Do it now! But that's not all: if you order two, you get two for the price of two, three for the price of three and so on. But wait, there's more! Not only do you get the T-shirt, but also the knowledge that you've paid for a bowl of rice somewhere in China, helped *NAG* fill its coffers and most importantly, made Jacqui very happy. Go on, order one! Do it now!

That's it. Give this issue your full attention. Send in those letters and prepare for the busiest season the industry has seen since the beginning of ever.

Michael James
Editor

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE
NAG
PC PLAYSTATION XBOX WII MOBILE
TOMB RAIDER
UNDERWORLD
intel Core 2

COVER STORY

Well it's Lara Croft again. Yes, we know, she has probably featured on more covers than anything or anyone else since we started this rag, but the love runs deep; and besides, she's the only legitimate cover girl we know. The final cover image you see on the magazine this month was chosen over two similar ones. Just for your interest and entertainment, the image we didn't use is on this page somewhere. There was much debate about which image to use and involved a token office poll. (But the final decision will always be mine; I like everyone to think they make a difference. It helps keep the morale up and all that). I felt the final image had more action elements to it. Lara's boat can also be seen in the background, and I just love the way the water slopes across the page. And that's enough justification for one day. In other news, we almost ended up running two different *Red Alert 3* covers this month, but the code Electronic Arts worked so hard (thanks Ralph) to organise for us just didn't make the review deadline. We really can't honestly review a game like that in three days – our readers come first.

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Q: What is a shark's favorite kind of sandwich?
A: Peanut butter and jellyfish!

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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Moses
SUBJECT: Letter of the month

“**ABOUT 3 MONTHS AGO** I decided to stop reading *NAG*, and this had nothing to do with the magazine itself. It's just that games where affecting my postgraduate studies. I was about to sell my Xbox 360 and my graphics card. Then about a week ago I saw a picture of Marcus Fenix on the cover of *NAG* "Gears of War 2". Wow, blood started pumping through my veins, pupils dilating, gamers will know that excitement. Believe me I bought the magazine because I wanted to know what "Gears of War 2" has in store for us, the first instalment is still best game I've ever played. I love gaming and *NAG* makes gaming awesome, and thanks for that. They say never judge a book by its cover, but you got back your No.1 fan because of a cover. I am working on my time management skills so that I can enjoy my games without any guilt."

Look, it's really great to have you back and all that, but I have to question your priorities in life. Forget the studies. Research shows (we asked a few people at the office) that most people never actually end up doing a job that relates to what they studied after school. Gaming, on the other hand, will always get you through the tough times until the day you drop and start stinking. Ed

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Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...

FROM: Layne
SUBJECT: In a world so grey...

“**I JUST WANT TO POINT** out something that I have noticed for some time now. With every new graphics card and engine released there is always this joyous celebration about better textures, lighting effects, particle systems, etc. however, the only difference I've noticed is that we get a few more shades of grey to add to the already vast repertoire. Where is all the creativity that game developers speak of? Innovation is something that is difficult to strive for but even if there is none in a game that uses a familiar genre; visual representation can either add or take away from the gaming experience. Resistance: Fall of Man and Gears of War, as an example, create post-apocalyptic worlds, and though detailed, they are very bland to look at. Just to note, I loved Gears of War. When are they going to get rid of the cookie-cutter idea that better looking dilapidated buildings and dirt make a great game? This problem also falls onto the Diablo III debate for me. People complain it's not dark enough, or brooding enough, but you can generate any atmosphere if you know how to utilise the colour palette to its full potential. Titans Quest was a highly underrated game that beat Diablo II as my favourite hack & slash and I have yet to tire of it. The amount of detail they put in that game was staggering and not even Diablo III has made such an impression from what I've seen, but I'm willing to give it the benefit of the doubt as I'm a huge Blizzard fan and the game isn't anywhere near complete. All I'm saying is that there are thousands of talented people out there who can design worlds beyond all expectation if they were just allowed to dip there paintbrush into a colour pool that didn't constrict them to a single shade so depressing and overused."

I do get what you're saying, but have you tried stepping out of your gaming comfort zone? Have you tried a game like Viva Piñata? You won't find any dark greens or rust-coloured walls in that game. These arguments have been raised in the past, and it appears that no matter what people say or do, nothing ever changes. Abandoned military bases will always consist of slabs of grey concrete with metal beams here and there, some explosive barrels and crates you can kick about until they fall apart. Thank goodness they also don't all have lava, giant rats and piles and piles of unused ammunition laying around. My suggestion to you: if you want a little colour in your games, stop playing the same kinds of games and try something new. Ed

FROM: Wayne
SUBJECT: How "LOSING" can crack a controller...

“**HI, MY NAME IS** Wayne and my friends and I started a PS3 club just last year. We all bought PlayStation 3's because we work with the public 7 days a week (which is not easy!) and this is the only thing that keeps our job away from our FUN GAMING WORLD!

This letter is not about our club, but a member in our club witch I will refer to as A.R.M.AN.D (Another Raging Maniac and Nutcase Dweller). [Did you come up with the acronym first? Ed]

After work on most weekends we cannot wait to get together and switch on the TV and start playing Gran Turismo or Call of Duty 4.

Killing or winning, we have a great time, but as the night progresses we hear a thumping sound and a lot of swearing. As we turn to the sideways we see a black controller on the floor and A.R.M.A.N.D hitting his fist against the wall. This didn't happened a lot, but as time goes on it's getting scarier. Just last month he almost used his fist to hit the console because he came second in Soul Calibur IV, but we stopped him just in time. We tried to talk to him every time he wants to punch something, but it doesn't help very much. He already broke one controller and the other one is on its way out!

I know he is not the only gamer out there with this problem. Everyone gets angry at some games, but not like this. We do not blame the game developers; we actually want to thank them for making such fantastic games to play. I believe that the people should take that 15 minute brake every hour played according to the games manual in front, which many people do not read.

I wrote this letter to NAG because all or most of its employees are gamers from birth and will know what I am talking about. We really want to help our friend! He doesn't know that we are writing this letter, so can you please give us some advice, doesn't matter if this letter gets published or not.

I just want to thank the NAG and its employees for a splendid job they are doing on keeping us updated on the games market. Also would like to thank Sony Computer for making one hell of a strong controller. It really takes a lot of A.R.M.A.N.D to break."

Over the years, I've come across people who get annoyed when they don't win. I don't play games with people like that. Their childish rantings when they don't win signals a problem with their upbringing. Of course, you can shout profanities at other players, tell them they suck, accuse them of cheating and mock them when they die at your hand. This is just how gamers are. We can't help it. Smashing controllers or hammering expensive hardware isn't the same thing. Unsportsmanlike behaviour is something you simply should not tolerate. Explain to your mate that it's not acceptable, and if he does it again, you're going to kick him out of the club and change the secret handshake. Trying to be nice to him isn't going to work, because people like that need a good honest talking to – you'll be doing him a big favour. Better yet, get him to read this reply so that he understands that his behaviour is not acceptable. Yes you! If you don't stop hitting things when you lose and learn to control your childish outbursts, you might hit the wrong thing one day and end up in serious trouble. Your mates don't like it. Nobody likes it. Calm down and try to have some fun. It's just a game. In general, you're also giving us gamers a bad name, and not helping when people ask if games cause violence in children. Ed

FROM: Shannon
SUBJECT: DVD trailers

“**GREETINGS ALL AT NAG!** Wow your magazine is good, have you ever heard that before? Yes? Well then it's for good reason. I have a rather pointless suggestion regarding the NAG DVD trailers. I feel that there should be more trailers showing in-game scenes. Now I'm not saying I dislike the cinematic trailers, but in-game trailers show what the game is about. For example, I'm quite surprised that the official Bethesda in-game trailers for Fallout 3 have not been put on the DVD, since that was done for Oblivion. To be honest, it's not a real problem, as NAG is that awesome, I'm just saying it could make the world a much better place."

We'll try to put more in-game footage on the DVD. It's a good suggestion. I think the problem is that the cinematic stuff just looks so gorgeous that it gets all the space and attention. Ed.

FROM: A Fanatic Fan
SUBJECT: Xbox Live

“**FIRSTLY I WANT TO** say, like all NAG fanatics, thank you for a great magazine every month! At the beginning of every month you will always find me sleeping in front of CNA waiting in anticipation for the doors to open. When they eventually open I will rush in and grab the first NAG magazine I see, tear of the plastic rapper and sniff the new magazine smell, well of course I will do this after I have paid for it. Then I will open the magazine carefully and read through it for as many times as I see fit. But this message is not just to praise your awesome awesomeness, but to ask you if you could explain to my fragile brain how to setup my Xbox 360 for Xbox

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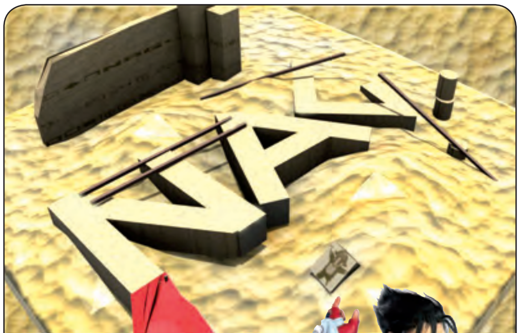
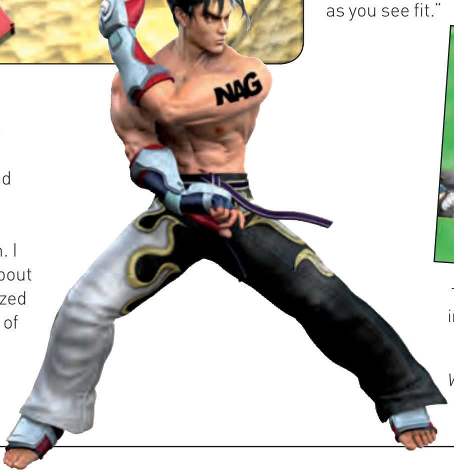
NAG FAN ARTWORK

This is what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the *NAG* logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame. In no order of importance:



Bradley Morris: "This image was completely modelled and rendered in blender v2.47, all the textures were done in Photoshop CS2 (took about 3 hours to render due to the ambient occlusion and the soft shadows). *NAG* has always been more advanced in their magazine :) that's why I did an Egyptian style excavation site, Hope you enjoy! I put the badger in as like the god the old civilisation worshiped. Feel free to remove it as you see fit."



Sheldon Evans: "I've done three artworks (attached) for you guys this month and hopefully they will make it into the NAG. *[Only one of them did, Ed]*. Tekken – Jin. I interviewed Jin Kazama about a week ago and I was amazed to find that he had a tattoo of the *NAG* logo done."

The readers who send in the best *NAG* fan art each month receive a copy of *Guinness World Record Gamer's Edition 2008*

Live. I have been struggling with this for some time now and just cannot seem to get it right. I don't know if South Africa can connect to Xbox Live because there is only 26 countries it shows when I want to do this and SA is not one of them. I will be ever so grateful if you would help me in this dire situation."

I can't tell you how problematic it is when it comes to Xbox LIVE in South Africa. In fact, I'm not even going to talk about it. :(I get this pain you see, right behind my left eye. It's like a throbbing... Yikes... it's starting again! Anyway, theatrics aside, it's actually very easy to connect to Xbox LIVE in South Africa, but this isn't the place to tell you how. I'm sure if you ask the nice people on the NAG *forums (www.nag.co.za), that someone will be more than willing to help you. Ed.*

FROM: Johan
SUBJECT: Shrinking NAG

"**AS YOU GET OLDER** things tend to get smaller. Now we've all rolled our eyes as grandpa told us yet again how back in his day you could get a double cheese burger at Wimpy for the same price you pay these days for a rave burger but it's not just the burgers and coke cans that are getting smaller. This shrinking phenomenon is far more widespread than you might think, and before I start sounding like grandpa don't get me wrong shrinking things is not always a bad thing. Processor die size, cell phones, all are shrinking at an amazing rate which means better gadgets for us to play with which is obviously a good thing.

However last night while restacking my NAG collection I found out something else has shrunk... the NAG magazine! I know what you're all saying; the magazine is bigger than ever so many pages vs. so many blah, blah etc. Yeah I know all that but if you don't believe me go and dig out the November 2002 edition and the December 2002 edition notice something? The one is exactly 1cm shorter measured from top to bottom. Then go and look at the September 2007 edition and October 2007 edition... same thing, its shrinking! To be honest I'm not sure whether this shrinking is a good or a bad thing, after all one day we might be able to put our NAG in our pocket with our IPOD which is a good thing right? And just think of all those trees we'd be saving.

So I guess this letter is really just to say 'sorry I rolled my eyes grandpa you were right, everything really is getting smaller'."

Well spotted. The reason for the reduction in height was to make way for more magazine pages. If you check the page count, you'll see that we increased the amount of pages in the December issue. Because you asked, I'll explain... Each magazine in the world is allocated a paper licence (something that you also apply for when you get the barcode). If you read the last bit of our barcode (after the two longer lines), you see a number: 053002. This is our registered paper licence number and is held in some government library in France – not sure why exactly but that's how it is. Essentially, NAG *can only use so much paper tonnage under this licence each year, so if we want to increase the number of pages in the magazine, we have to make the whole thing smaller. You see, if you reduce the height and/or width, you can then use the same volume of paper saved to increase the depth. See, it all makes sense... Ed.*

FROM: Elsa
SUBJECT: NAG

"**WHEN WILL THE NEW** NAG come out, do you have a list of all the dates of each month when the NAG comes out?"

NAG*'s usually on shelf on the last Thursday of every month. Ed* **NAG**

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: In light of all the controversy surrounding the Digital Rights Management in Spore, do you think DRM helps or hinders the gaming industry?

CaViE: DRM in Spore never stopped it being mass pirated, so, unless it can be better implemented, in its current state, it just serves as a general hindrance to the industry, only, making it harder on the legitimate buyers..

Chevron: Drm does not stop piracy. It pushes users to pirated content. People who pirate get a product that does not force them to jump through hoops and just works.

Nduimiso: Current DRM hinders the market. It doesn't stop the pirates at all and it pisses off the consumers. DRM should be there but not seen as in the consumer should never know it existed, no CD keys, online activation, limited installs etc.

Azimuth: Heh, wait. I'm the one who paid for the game, and *I* get stuck with a rootkit? Nice.

Isengard: DRM is effectively endorsing pirating of games by telling legitimate customers "up yours", if all games just used Steam then problem solved.

DXeXodus: A system that treats legitimate buyers like criminals is hardly satisfactory. As for people that don't have internet, it is downright unfair.

Gazza_N: DRM is a purely reactionary measure. If publishers bothered to work out why games are pirated and catered to those findings instead of just assuming that all pirates are in it to screw them out of their money, they'd have better sales. For now, DRM just causes misery for everyone and hinders people from playing games they've paid good money for.

wisp: DRM definately hinders the industry , it helps to exclude a large percentage of the populus who do not have the internet at home there by "forcing" them to play a pirated copy .The DRM idea is good in principle but the implementation sucks.

FEN1X: Out of the the 8 people I know who are playing Spore, 1 has a legitimate copy. DRM certainly did not help, so why bother? Rather reward your buyers than punish them. Remember, every game can be pirated.

Enigma: DRM hinders the gaming industry, it encourages piracy by treating legitimate users like criminals.

cr@zydude: DRM seems to only hinder those people who actually buy the game. While game companies may feel that coppy protection is need, it should not be detectable or in anyway hinder of harm the end user or his computer.

Fredder: It is a 50-50 for me, but people will always try to get freebies where possible . . .

KFC: DRM seems to be a good, working system at first glance, but when one looks at it, its rather complicated. All the requirements like internet registrations, downloads etc. , just to get it working, is a waste of time and resources. And that's why it is being pirated in high numbers, since the gamers want it easily Installable and accessible.

Takiro: DRM only punnishes honest users, and forces some of us to piracy.

Reneg8de: Hinder... Short enough? :-) (MD: Yes, actually. Thank you!)

lizzard: DRM is more of annoyance than anything else... I bought spore and get more trouble than its worth.

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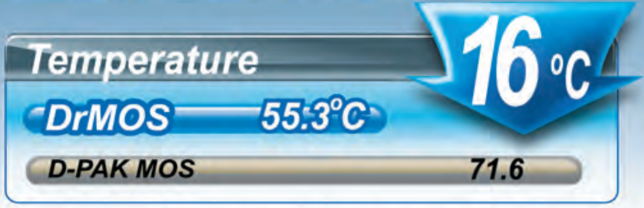
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APRIL FOOLS

Hidden Street Fighter IV Character Unlocked

WHAT WAS ONCE AN April Fools' joke by *Electronic Gaming Monthly* has now become a reality. Rewind to April, 1992, when EGM ran an article on how to unlock a hidden character in *Street Fighter 2*. It's easy, they said: just win the first round of every fight with a Perfect round and never continue.

According to *EGM*, the master of Ken and Ryu, called Sheng Long, would jump in as the final boss. Unfortunately for all those players who actually attempted this insane feat, it really was just an April Fools' gag.

The idea behind the gag resulted from poking fun at the poor translation in the *Street Fighter 2* arcade game. Ryu's win statement should have been translated as, "You must defeat my Dragon Punch to stand a chance," but was instead mis-translated to "You must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance."

Sheng Long is one way to translate "rising dragon punch." The statement was corrected in the SNES version of *SF2*, but the game manual for the SNES version confused matters even further, stating that Sheng Long is the master of Ken and Ryu.

Fast-forward to 2008. Thanks to the legendary status of the confusion, a master for Ken and Ryu, named Gouken, has been worked into official *Street Fighter* canon. Gouken is generally considered to be the Japanese name for Sheng Long. In celebration of this epic hoax, Capcom has actually made Gouken a hidden ultimate boss in *Street Fighter IV*, patterning his appearance after the faked screenshots in *EGM*'s April Fools' gag instructions on how to fight him.

To fight Gouken in the arcade version of *SFIV*, you must win the first round of every fight, never continue and depending on the settings of the arcade machine, get a certain number of Perfect rounds. Gouken will then appear after Seth, the final regular boss.

From April Fools to reality, you now really must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance.

[I was actually caught by this April Fools back in the day via word-of-mouth and really did try to unlock the "hidden character" in the terrible NES port of *Street Fighter 2*, having been led to believe it would work. I'd like those few weeks of my life back, please. - Miktar]

TIBERIUM LEFT UNHARVESTED

In a somewhat surprising (yet merciful) move, EA has decided to cancel *Tiberium* – its upcoming FPS based in the *Command & Conquer* universe. After the game's projected release date was knocked back to 2010 in July, it's been downhill all the way. Citing quality standards as its major concern, EA has decided to scrap the project altogether. Mike Verdu, executive producer at EA Los Angeles, had this to say in a memo circulated through the company:

"It is with a heavy heart that I announce an end to all work on *Tiberium* effective immediately... we will not be able to deliver this product to an appropriate level of quality.

The game had fundamental design challenges from the start. We fought to correct the issues, but we were not successful; the game just isn't coming together well enough to meet our own quality expectations as well as those of our consumers."

Several staff members working on the project have also been released, which means the project will likely not be seeing the light of day for a while - if ever. After the dismally average *C&C Renegade*, perhaps it's all for the best.

AGE OF CONAN STUMBLES... PICKS ITSELF BACK UP

Despite performing some serious rock and roll all over the sales charts during its launch month, *Age of Conan* – the action-heavy MMORPG from Funcom – has been suffering from lacklustre support once everyone's bundled 30 days wore off. Still, a dedicated few remain, although apparently not enough to keep the game's servers sufficiently populated. To rectify this, Funcom has decided to merge all servers. Although they haven't mentioned any specifics yet, it looks like all European and American servers will be consolidated, although will likely still remain 'region-independent'.

This comes as a bit of a blow to Funcom following the departure of co-founder Gaute Godager. Not ready to curl up into the foetal position just yet, the developers continue to march ahead with their DirectX 10 plans, and should implement the updated graphics in the near future. Director Craig Morrison stated, "Once the next gameplay update is out, expect to start to see the DX10 functionality coming to the test environment. How long it will take to transition to live will depend on the testing of course, but it's starting to shape up nicely."

RUMOUR-MONGERING: FALLOUT MMO BY 2014

SO, *FALLOUT 3* IS here and you're excited. You love *Fallout*, you missed *Fallout* and you're quite happy to sink countless hours into the game, but can't help but get your head twisted up about just how un-*Fallout* this whole Bethesda thing is, right? Fair enough – we've got something for you to look forward to then.

First, a quick history lesson to get you up to speed: the publishers behind the original post-apocalyptic jaunt, Interplay, had some financial woes some years back and went belly-up – forced to relocate to a tiny office and cease all publishing for a few years. They took down their Website, closed their doors and turned their backs on an army of weeping *Fallout* fans pawing at their gates in dismay. Now, after far too long, Interplay is back and ready to rumble.

After some extensive detective work, we've come up with the following facts: despite Bethesda owning the licence for *Fallout*, Interplay retained the rights to publish a *Fallout* MMO, provided they secure at least $30 million for development, begin that development before 4 April 2009 and actually publish the game by 2014. Secondly, Interplay recently sold two million shares to publisher Interactive Game Group to score a huge cash injection. Thirdly, Interplay re-hired original *Fallout* developers Christopher Taylor (Lead designer) and Jason Anderson (Lead artist). They followed this up by posting a wanted ad for a technical director, clearly stating, "Wouldn't Hurt to Have: Previous MMORPG experience. Familiarity with the *Fallout* universe." Getting a clear picture yet? If not, here's the sinker: Interplay recently began putting the coveted V13 logo on their site. Many *Fallout* fans will know V13 stands for Vault 13, but it was announced long ago to be the codename for a *Fallout* MMO that has been talked about for years.

In short: expect a *Fallout* MMO sometime in the near future, designed by at least a few of the original crew behind this epic RPG.

THOMPSON GETS THE BOOT

Every gamer's favourite villain has finally been given the finger by the Florida Supreme Court and had his licence to practice law in Florida revoked - permanently. That's right – Jack Thompson is now, officially, a raving lunatic not to be taken seriously by anyone. The decision, which Thompson is obviously appealing, was passed on the recommendation by Judge Dava Tunis on 25 September; Thompson has 30 days to sort out his ~~childlike scrawling~~ financial documentation and close his doors. While it's great news that the number-one legal representative behind America's anti-videogame violence "movement" has had his link to the justice system severed, there's (unfortunately) nothing stopping him from his soapbox ranting and general ruckus causing.

snippets

YOUR ESSENTIAL INFO, NOW IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

HOT PURSUIT
Ah, *Trivial Pursuit* – the good,old family game that's been known for breaking up long-standing friendships faster than the last slice of pizza. Now that paper doesn't exist and people only play games in front of their glowing LCDs, EA is ready to capitalise on the lagging board game market and bring this brain-crunching classic to every console, handheld and mobile platform they can. It should be out for mobile any time now, with home console versions coming early next year, giving you plenty of time to figure out a way to crib the entire Wikipedia onto the back of your hand – we know you're already thinking about it.

PLAY WITH LEGO, BE AWESOME LIKE THIS GUY
Whether you call it dedication, obsession or just plain crazy, it ranks pretty high up on our wall of cool. LEGO-mad Scotsman, Keith Brogan, has combined the old with the new to create this 75cm Mario entirely out of LEGO pieces. Where it gets really clever is how exactly he got all those proportions just right: Brogan used a the NextEngine 3D scanner and accompanying mesh-based software, together with 3D package Modo, to put the piece together in a matter of hours in the virtual realm – giving him an exact blueprint for the real deal.

LOCAL XBOX PRICES DROP
If it wasn't enough that you can pick up an Xbox Arcade system for less than the price of a Wii or a PSP, Microsoft South Africa has decided to join the rest of the world and drop the machine's prices locally. As of now, you'll be able to pick up an Xbox Arcade for R1,799, a Premium system with 60GB hard drive for R2,699 and the 120GB-endowed Elite package for R3,499. Well, what are you waiting for?

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, THE NINTENDO DSi

THE DS IS A wonderful piece of technology. It may not pack the horsepower of Sony's competitor or many of the nifty gadgets of its mobile opponents, but as a concentrated gaming platform it works wonders. However, it seems as though Nintendo isn't content to let the DS remain "just" a gaming device, and have announced a revamped version – the Nintendo DSi. No, Nintendo hasn't gone into automobile production, but they have taken a serious look at what people want to do with their DSs, and responded accordingly.

The DSi will feature 3.25" screens (up from 3"), two cameras – a 3-megapixel camera on the outside and a 0.3MP facing inwards (for video chat) - an SD card slot as well as built-in flash memory and the ability to load additional software on the device. It will ship with a Web browser (we suspect this is where the "i" comes in) and multimedia playback has also been given its share of attention. Other features worth mentioning include improved speakers, a redesign of the power button and the (unfortunate for some) missing GBA cartridge slot to allow for a slimmer device. All these great extras come at a price, however: battery life will reportedly be reduced by 20% and customers can expect to pay a little more for the DSi than the current DS Lite, although that will likely settle after a few months. Japan is getting the device towards the end of the year, with the rest of the world seeing shipments arriving Q1/Q2 2009.

TOLD YOU SO!

We all know that girls play games. It's fairly obvious that the majority of the world's population does like to be entertained by flashy colours and interactive lines of code, but now it's official, and we've got *Guitar Hero* to prove it. American teen pop group Aly and AJ, who we'd honestly never heard of before now, are backing these unique, super-girly *Guitar Hero* controllers. Only available for the PS2 and Wii versions of the game (because everybody knows girls don't play on the Xbox 360 or PS3), and coming in at $70 a piece, likely putting them in at R600 or so, we're not exactly holding our breaths.

THEY SAID IT...

"Will DSi do well with [the DS's] demographic? It probably will. Will it be a product that expands their user base beyond under 12? I'm not sure."

John Koller, Director of hardware marketing, Sony

"I think it's regrettable that we are flooded with games that promote these negative emergences. It may be one of the most straightforward ways to design a game."

Masaya Matsuura, co-creator of *Parappa the Rapper*

"[In designing *Far Cry 2*'s multiplayer modes,] finding a balance that would have its own unique spirit and be fun to play, but still borrow some of the elements that were really working for the single-player and put them to use for ourselves, was a really big part of the challenge."

Hardy LeBel, senior multiplayer designer on *Far Cry 2*

"I think 'design' used to be where you would just write a gigantic design document that was huge, and you'd throw it over the wall, and say, "That's our design!" And that's clearly not how a 4D product works; your dynamic is through time. It's not like designing the Sydney Opera House, where it's just a static object."

Chuck Beaver, senior producer on *Dead Space*

BREAKING NEWS: ONLINE GAMERS ARE FIT!

PHYSICALLY, AT LEAST, ACCORDING to researchers at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles as well as researchers at the Palo Alto Research Center, also in California, and the University of Delaware in Newark.

Mentally, online gamers may have to go on a diet.

The researchers quizzed 7,000 players in *EverQuest II* about their physical and mental health, rewarding participants with a specially created virtual weapon, the "Greatstaff of the Sun Serpent." The resulting survey responses were combined with statistics about the players' online activities and playing habits. The results suggest that adult gamers have an average body mass index of 25.2, compared to the overall American average of 28. The average gamer also engages in vigorous exercise once or twice a week, which the researchers say is more than most Americans. While the reasons for this are not apparent, the team suggests it may be because more educated, wealthier people are attracted to computer games and such people tend to take better care of their health.

On the downside, gamers reported more cases of depression and substance abuse than their compatriots. "They may be drawn to use the game to help deal with emotional distress," says team member Scott Caplan of the University of Delaware.

Additionally, the research also suggests that there were more players in their thirties than in their twenties, and that older players tended to spend more time in the game. Also, while fewer women played the game, those who did would play for longer than men.

From the Nottingham Trent University in the UK, Mark Griffiths finds that most gamers simply exhibit healthy enthusiasm for their hobby rather than the stereotypical obsessive addiction. He agrees that the new results "sound about right," but adds that since the research only studied one multiplayer game, its conclusions may not be true for single-player console games. "They involve very different psychologies," he says.

In other news, *NAG* has personally done intense scientific research in the area of gaming and has deduced that gamers like to eat snacks, watch movies and tend to be positive, outgoing individuals who love to donate money to worthy causes (like rAge) and cuddle kittens.

MADNESS? THIS IS GAME DEVELOPAAA!

Zack Snyder, known for his super-beefy, super-'slowmo', super-gory, historically-accurate fighting movie *300* (based on a true story), is turning his talents to videogames. Having signed a deal with Electronic Arts to work on three new original Intellectual Properties, Snyder will "lead the creative direction of the games while working in partnership with the production team at EA Los Angeles", according to EA.

His production company, Cruel & Unusual Films, will be producing movies based on the games. Snyder is currently busy directing the big-screen version of the *Watchmen* graphic novel, but won't have any involvement on the videogame tie-in currently being developed by Deadline Games.

This is not the first time EA has made a pact with a big-shot Hollywood director. In fact, their last hookup was with Steven Spielberg on *BOOM BLOX* for the Wii, which is actually a damn fine game.

HALO HEAD-HUNTING

Microsoft has been furiously recruiting new blood over at Microsoft Game Studios as part of their efforts to expand the *Halo* team and bring fresh ideas to the table. They've recently hired Ryan Paton, assistant producer on *MGS4*, id Software's Kenneth Scott and Gearbox programmer Corrine Yu to name a few. It's clear that Microsoft has big plans for the future of the *Halo* brand, Phil Spencer, head of the Studio said, "There are more than two or three teams building *Halo* right now."

HALO MMO COULD HAVE BEEN

With the tears finally starting to dry, a few hidden truths behind Ensemble's once-hallowed walls are coming to light. The biggest bit of news to come our way is that Ensemble was working on a *Halo* MMO sometime in 2006 and 2007. The top-secret but oft-rumoured project was secretly canned by Microsoft before production got too deep, but that didn't stop a couple of screenshots from sneaking out now that the studio has closed its doors. Of course, since it's almost impossible to get any concrete information about these kinds of things, rumours are now floating around that the new, yet-to-be appointed studio may carry on with the unfinished project. Who knows, maybe they'll pick up *StarCraft Ghost* and *Duke Nukem Forever* while they're at it, if wishful thinking has anything to do with it.

FABLE II: NO ONLINE CO-OP AT LAUNCH - SORTA

Even though the game has gone gold, *Fable II* is still being developed. According to information at Microsoft's Gamescore Blog, the ability for online cooperative play won't be available at launch. Apparently, an update patching online cooperative play will be "available within the first week of the game's launch." Trading with players online will still be functional right off the bat. The game's designer, Peter Molyneux, has said in a recent interview that online co-op may be patched in right on launch day, depending on how fast the team works. Either way, *Fable II* should be in stores by 21 October.

SCANDAL!

God Of War Creator Sued For Alleged Copyright Infringement

GET READY FOR YOUR dose of he-said she-said. Sony Computer Entertainment of America and *God of War* designer David Jaffe have been sued for allegedly stealing their ideas from a book and a map. The suit, filed in late February by Jonathan Bisson-Dath and Jennifer Barrette-Herzog, claims that Jaffe stole his ideas from *Olympiad* (a screenplay by Bisson-Dath) and *Island at the Edge of the Living World* (a map by Barrette-Herzog that was submitted as part of Bisson-Dath's work: *The Adventures of Own: Owen's Olympic Adventure*).

The plaintiffs claim that in 2002 they sent their work to Sony Pictures as well as agents who did business with SCEA. They claim that aside from the "coincidence" of *God of War* shipping in 2005 and taking three years to develop, the game shares elements of plot, character relationships, themes, settings, mood, pace and dialogue with their works.

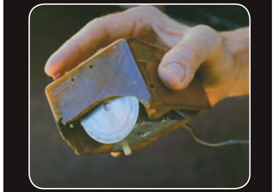
A few claims of "suspicious similarities" include:

- Plaintiffs' works tell the original story of how a champion saves Athens from destruction by the invading Spartan army that has been sent by Ares... [*GoW*]... is the story of how a champion chosen by Zeus and Athens saves Athen from destruction by an invading army sent by Ares...
- In plaintiffs' original work and *God of War*, the Champion's family is hacked to death in a one-room building in a small, peaceful village. In both stories the Champion feels partially responsible even though he is not really to blame...
- In exchange for Kratos's pledge, Ares gives him the Blades of Chaos... two massive, glowing, sword-like blades fastened to chains fused to Kratos's wrists... These Blade of Chaos are taken directly from a scene in Bisson-Dath's work... "As Zeus strides forward... his hands MORPH into two massive swords that glow like light sabers..."
- ...Owen must cross the Bottomless Valley over a long, sagging suspension bridge, shown on Barrette-Herzog's map... in *God of War* Kratos must cross the Bottomless Chasm on a long, sagging suspension bridge...

SCEA and Jaffe have responded denying any copyright infringement. Additionally, the plaintiffs' delineation of specific alleged similarities are described as "inaccurate, incomplete, abstracted and/or misleading." SCEA and Jaffe have also requested that they be reimbursed for legal costs incurred in their defence.

It is highly unlikely anything will come of this, since both works fit snugly into the public-domain realm of Greek Mythology. This whole thing smells like a quick attempt to cash in. What's next? Nintendo being sued because *Super Mario Bros.* is too similar to some aging hipster's autobiography about his adventures in psychedelic land?

THE EVOLUTION OF: The Mouse



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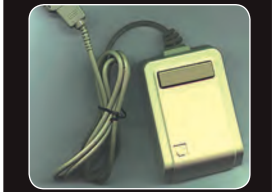

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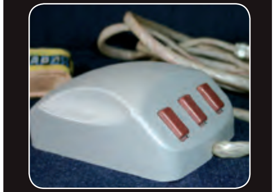

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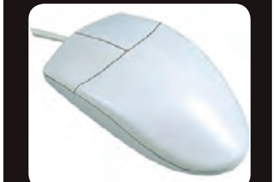
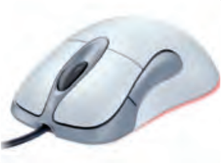
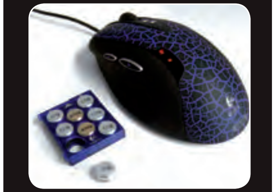


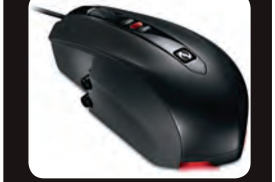
1994



1997



2007



2008

THE XBOX 360 OUTSOLD the PlayStation 3 in Japan in September. This is a first for the Xbox 360 in Sony's home market. Microsoft sold 53,547 Xbox 360 units in the four weeks to September 28, compared to the 33,071 PlayStation 3 units. Nintendo maintained its market lead in the Japanese console market, selling 109,548 Wii units in the same period. In terms of handhelds, Nintendo sold 234,477 units of the Nintendo DS, versus 109,274 Sony PlayStation Portables.

Sony's director of hardware marketing, John Koller, had a few things to say about Nintendo's recent revealing of the DSi handheld. "I can see the DSi being successful," he told Gizmodo. "The DS Lite was obviously very successful." He added: "Will DSi do well with [the DS's] demographic? It probably will. Will it be a product that expands their user base [beyond] under 12? I'm not sure." While it's true that Sony has always targeted an older audience with their PSP, the suggestion that it's only children buying and playing the DS system shows a lack of attention on behalf on Koller.

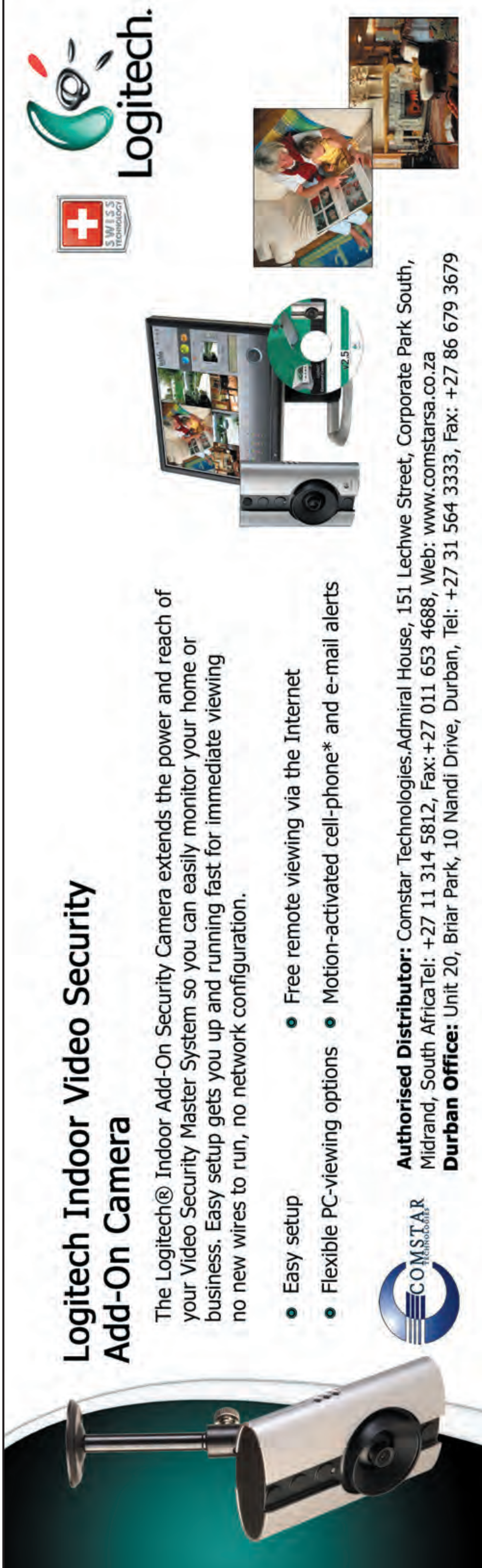
Acclaim boss, David Perry, seems to like the new model DS. "Nintendo, in their handheld evolution, tend to take baby steps. The DS was a big step, it gave me hope they would keep innovating faster than normal," said Perry, speaking exclusively to GamesIndustry.biz. "This new DS is a decent step, but based on their amazing launch of Wii, I was hoping they'd produce an 'industry-changer' for the DS."

Sony Online Entertainment boss, John Smedley, has revealed more about Sony's console development strategy: every future Sony Online Entertainment game is console-bound. "It's pretty safe to say that *EverQuest* has not seen its last game," Smedley said, asked whether the company would be returning to compete with *World of Warcraft* and *Warhammer Online*. "So we've got our own cards to play there, and I think we will play them at the right time. But the quality level will be something that people will be very happy with."

The recent price cuts for the Xbox 360 are not a reaction to slowing sales, according to Microsoft's Steve Ballmer. "That's the craziest thing I've ever heard anybody say," replied Ballmer when asked if price reductions were evidence that Microsoft had run out of ideas to boost hardware sales. "All consoles start at higher prices. They always come down through the long cycle."

With regards to the Wii storage issues: from spring 2009, Japanese consumers will be able to download software directly to an SD card via the Wii Shopping Channel. "We have to address the console's insufficient memory storage," said Iwata. No announcement on when the rest of us will be able to store more than a handful of channels and games on our Wii.

Data specialist GfK Chart Track has revealed the current console install base for the UK: as of September 2008, the PlayStation 3 has reached 1.4 million units, the Xbox 360 2.3 million and the Wii 3.6 million units.



GOING UP

Elevator Action, the oldschool action platformer for both arcade machines of yore and the classic NES, is getting a sequel – with light guns! Currently only confirmed for arcades in Japan, the game booth features real working elevator doors that can open and close at the press of a button. While no ports to console have yet been confirmed, Square-Enix, which owns the developers, Taito, are historically very comfortable on both Sony and Nintendo's consoles – both of which have shown their willingness and ability to support light guns.

PEDDLE DRUGS IN THE NEW GTA

If there's one company that loves the idea behind 'there's no such thing as bad publicity', it's Rockstar. Their upcoming release – *GTA Chinatown Wars*, a grungy, hardcore, cel-shaded isometric romp for the kiddy-friendly DS platform – is certainly not out to make any friends in Australia, by the looks of things. The game will feature a drug-dealing mini-game, reminiscent of the classic *DopeWars*, in which players buy and sell all manner of iconically depicted drugs including cocaine, heroin and LSD. While it's clear that the game is certainly not aimed at anyone under the age of 18, one has to ask how much something like this will actually enhance the gameplay, and how much is just 'because'.

MYTHIC KEEPS WAR CLEAN FROM DAY ONE

Gold-sellers beware: Mythic is officially not putting up with any nonsense when it comes to *Warhammer Online*. The developers have, at the time of writing, banned over five thousand accounts for trading in-game currency for real-world dosh and other dodgy practices clearly in violation of the EULA. In a recent interview, Mark Jacobs – head of Mythic Entertainment – was quoted as saying, "I hate gold sellers with every fibre of my being." Apparently a few enterprising gold farmers have even offered him a sneaky hand-out if he kept quiet about their activities in the game, to which Jacobs' steely reply was, "My answer was and always will remain the same: Go to hell."

RUMOUR: NEW WII BY 2011

ACCORDING TO JOHN DAVIDSON of whattheyplay.com, multiple sources in the game development and publishing sectors claim that Nintendo is currently showing early presentations of its next home console hardware to shareholders.

Allegedly set to hit "by 2011," the new console is claimed to be the true "next-generation" Nintendo console and far more than a simple refresh of current hardware. The new system will be presented as a true successor to the Wii and is being dubbed by those who have seen the presentation as "Wii HD," although there is no indication that this will be its final name. The nature of the transition has been likened to "the shift from Game Boy to Game Boy Advance," where, while familiar, key elements were left intact, the core hardware was made much more powerful.

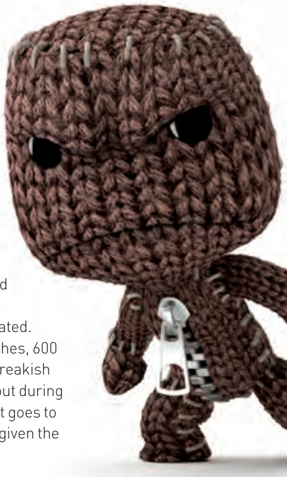
While sources are reluctant to be specific, some generalisations include assured high-definition visuals, greater emphasis on digitally distributed and backward-compatible content as well as local storage.

Speculation is that the "Wii HD" will in terms of hardware be as powerful as the current Xbox 360, moving away from the GameCube-based hardware the Wii piggybacks on. Nintendo doesn't really seem interested in playing the hardware game anymore, having found a good groove with "interesting" input devices instead. No doubt the local storage will follow the route Nintendo has already taken with the Wii and the new DSi, using SD flash media but in a much more usable form from that of the Wii currently with its slow access speeds and lengthy encryption measures. Additionally, it is believed that Nintendo will be the first to implement holographic data storage in a console. They recently reached a Joint Research Agreement with InPhase, the leaders in high-capacity holographic data storage. There's no way of telling if or when this method of storage will be used in a future console, but it sure is exciting!

A TOOL WITHIN A TOOL (WITHIN A GAME)

With the recent Beta release of Media Molecule's *LittleBigPlanet*, a free-form, physics-focused puzzle-platformer with a penchant for user-generated content, the gaming world has been inundated with levels ranging from the bizarre (such as a player-controlled puppet Godzilla crashing through the Tokyo cityscape) to the ingenious (a fully-operational, albeit somewhat simplified version of *Tetris*) and everything in between. While, at the very least, it's proved that some people have way too much time on their hands, it's also opened up a world of visual programming of sorts to the insanely determined.

Recently, a particularly determined user created a simple calculator capable of adding or subtracting two double-digit numbers. Players can change the numbers to be calculated with a few switches, but behind the scene (well, directly above it) things are a little more complicated. Comprising of approximately 610 magnetic switches, 600 wires and 430 pistons, the machine looks like a freakish mechanical monster more than a tool you whip out during a Maths final – still, it's an awesome idea and just goes to show what people are willing to do when they're given the creative freedom (and too much spare time).



GAMING CHARTS

Look & Listen
DVD • CD • GAMES — MP3 • ACCESSORIES

LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS...

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
2	Saints Row 2
3	Midnight Club: Los Angeles
4	FIFA 09
5	Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

XBOX 360

1	Gears of War 2
2	Fable 2
3	Silent Hill: Homecoming
4	Dead Space
5	Tomb Raider: Underworld

PLAYSTATION 2

1	Need for Speed Undercover
2	WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
3	Pro Evolution Soccer 2008
4	James Bond Quantum of Solace: The Game
5	LEGO Batman: The Videogame

PC

1	Call of Duty: World at War
2	Far Cry 2
3	Brother in Arms: Hell's Highway
4	Crysis Warhead
5	Spore

PSP

1	Need for Speed Undercover
2	FIFA 09
3	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed
4	Midnight Club: LA Remix
5	Secret Agent Clank

WII

1	Super Smash Bros. Brawl
2	Sonic Unleashed
3	Disney: Sing it! Featuring Camp Rock
4	Wii Fit
5	Resident Evil: The Umbrella Chronicles

GfK

August figures provided by GfK
www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

1	Beijing 2008
2	Grand Theft Auto 4
3	Soul Calibur 4
4	Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns of the Patriots
5	Medal of Honor: Airborne

XBOX 360

1	Grand Theft Auto 4
2	Beijing 2008
3	Soul Calibur 4
4	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock
5	Need For Speed: ProStreet

PLAYSTATION 2

1	The Sims 2 Platinum Triple Collection
2	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
3	Kung Fu Panda
4	WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 2008
5	Ben 10: Protector of the Earth

PC

1	The Sims 2 Delux
2	FIFA 2007
3	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
4	Need For Speed : Carbon Collector's Edition
5	The Sims 2 : Pets

PSP

1	Burnout Legends
2	Need For Speed: ProStreet
3	WWE Smackdown! vs. RAW 2006
4	FIFA 2007
5	Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix

WII

1	Wii Sports
2	Wii Fit
3	Mario Kart
4	Wii Play
5	Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games

THE SIMS MOVIE PLOT UNVEILED

SO, YOU KNOW ABOUT *The Sims* movie. How are they going to turn a game with no plot into a movie? According to producer John Davis, here's the idea:

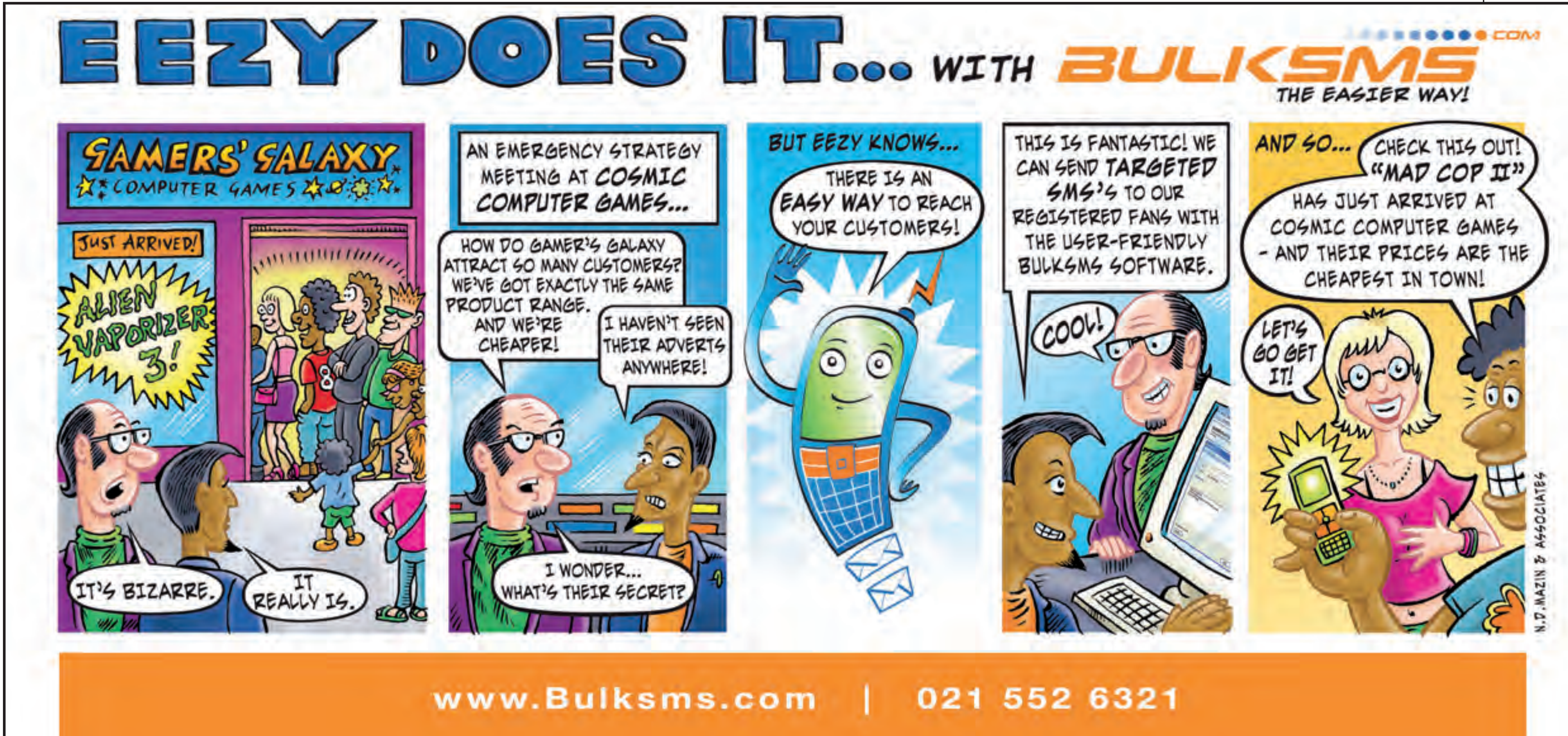
"... So this is the way I did it: *The Sims*, as you know, you can control your imaginary world, right? And in our movie, a young man, a 16-year-old kid or a 14-year-old kid and his friend get their hands on this thing called *The Sims Infinity Pack*, right, which is kind of this very strange video game store which was there just for that moment, and seemingly wasn't and all that. But what they realize is that they can scan their world in, because this is the most life like, real *Sims* game ever. And as they are playing this they are all of a sudden realizing is what they are playing on the game is having an effect on the real world. So in effect, through the game, they are able to control their world. It's wish fulfillment, and obviously it turns against them."

Is it just us, or does this sound terrible?

UMBRELLA CORP GETS N-GAGED

The *Resident Evil* series has always been fairly open to the idea of flirting with platforms outside its native Sony homeland – poking around the DreamCast, GameCube, Wii and soon even the Xbox 360. However, in 2005, Capcom discovered the joy of bringing evil right into their players' pockets through the mobile game *Resident Evil: The Missions*. Now, settling with Nokia's powerful N-Gage platform as its roost for an upcoming film tie-in called *Resident Evil Degeneration*.

General Manager of Capcom mobile, Takeshi Tezuka, says "We believe that the platform is an excellent home for some of our most famous franchises and our dedication to quality and creative thinking has seen us create a unique game with stunning visuals and in-depth gameplay, never before seen on the mobile". Sounds good to us.



BIOSHOCK FOR PS3 READY TO RAPTURE

PLAYSTATION 3 OWNERS ARE finally able to go vacation in not-so-sunny Rapture, the underwater art-deco utopia filled with genetically mutated little girls and bees.

The PS3 version arrives with a 4.98GB install, which will take approximately 10 minutes (Rapture-related advertisements and music will entertain you), a new "survivor mode" difficulty and some exclusive puzzle stages released as DLC "shortly after launch".

Survivor Mode makes the enemies tougher, they'll deal more damage and Vita-Chambers will restore less EVE upon resurrection (making it a form of death penalty). The DLC stages take place in arena-style levels designed to look like Rapture and involve solving mild puzzles (such as saving a Little Sister from a broken Ferris Wheel by triggering switches).

If you're not sold on the spiritual successor to *System Shock 2*, a demo is available on PSN.

MMO IN YOUR POCKET? YES PLEASE!

Sony Online Entertainment, the developer and publishers behind *Everquest I* and *II* as well as *Star Wars Galaxies*, has made a firm commitment to extend all its future MMO releases past the PC and on to console. While it's fairly obvious they're referring to the PS3, reports tell that the faithful little PSP shouldn't be discounted as a platform chock-full of potential. With regards to PC and PS3, John Smedley, president of SOE, commented on the future of the *Everquest* series in particular, saying "...we developed our codebase such that the engine will run on across both [platforms]. So there was some upfront investment, certainly, but we've invested in making sure that the technology runs on both. We're adapting controls and some of the communication features but we're trying to keep the same primary game."

POST-PRODUCTION DEPRESSION HITS SILICON KNIGHTS

While there's nothing atypical about laying off a certain number of developers after production of a particularly big game is finished, one can only look at *Silicon Knights* with a bit of scepticism after hearing up to 30 staff members have been "temporarily laid-off". Most interesting is president and founder Dennis Dyack's statement that, "These 26 individuals are hard-working and valued team members that we hope to bring back as we ramp up on our future projects" – possibly hinting at a continuation of the *Too Human* brand, though we're not convinced that'd be such a swell idea.

SEGA WANTS IN, LEARNS TO JUMP A FEW HOOPS

Violent videogames have and always will have trouble getting into certain markets. Having the ESRB slap a sales-destroying 'Adults Only' label on a retail package pretty much confirms a good half of the gaming public won't touch it. While it's almost guaranteed that *MadWorld*, SEGA's upcoming black, white and red Frank Miller-inspired arena combat game, will receive at least a Mature rating, the publishers are working side-by-side with the ESRB to ensure (read: beg) that they stay above water, as many retailers in the States simply refuse to stock games over that rating. More sensitive markets, including Japan, Germany and Australia (which lacks a classification over 15+) will likely not see the game at all – something the Japanese public is unimpressed with, considering the game was developed by Osaka-based Platinum Games.

YOUTUBE ENTERS THE DIGITAL GAME DISTRIBUTION MARKET

The Internet is a marvel of technology – almost anything you want is accessible at just a few button clicks, but that's obviously not easy enough for some people. Now, Google is readying itself to save the world from this predicament. Besides making people's lives easier, Google is also a fan of having lots of money – two business principles that it strives to combine at every opportunity. To make this magical combination possible, the company will soon start selling downloadable videogames through its YouTube video service using a simple system – you watch a game trailer, gameplay video or interview, think how much you'd love to own that game, click the nearby link and begin the transaction. The wonders of modern commerce take care of the rest. No solid news yet as to when exactly the service will launch, nor if we'll see it locally. Stay tuned for more information.

FIRST DEUS EX 3 DETAILS EMERGE

After months of rumour and speculation, some solid information about the next *Deus Ex* game has hit the airwaves. Players will take on the role of private security officer Adam Jensen in a futuristic Shanghai; the city is divided into two – the rich live above while the poor live in their perpetual shadow down below. The developers have promised that any mistakes made in the somewhat disappointing *Deus Ex 2: Invisible War* will be rectified, and although they'll be making moves to pull in the mainstream crowd, won't forget the game's roots. However, the game will be taking a more action-packed approach to the action/RPG genre – relying on player skill rather than stats to determine accuracy, with the addition of a cover system and an all-the-rage time-delay health system, similar to that seen in *Call of Duty 4*. We're not quite sure how to react, to be honest, but we're getting that sinking feeling already.

MICROSOFT SECURES MORE EXCLUSIVE DLC

First it was *GTA IV*, then *Fallout 3* and now Microsoft has announced that they've managed to secure exclusive downloadable content for *Tomb Raider:Underworld*. The content releases will begin late December with *Beneath the Ashes*, providing willing players with up to six hours additional game time taking place after the events in the game. Taking us into early 2009 will be *Lara's Shadow*, introducing a new playable character (the leading-lady's shadow, perhaps?) and will "create a unique *Tomb Raider* experience". Both packs will feature new environments to explore, new puzzles to wrack your brains and new monsters to shoot. Pricing is not yet confirmed.

NOVEMBER RELEASES

Subject to change
Release list and special offers provided by **www.kalahari.net**

Date	Game	Platforms
7	Banjo 3	**360**
7	Blitz: The League	**PS3, 360**
7	Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	**DS**
7	Eyetoy: Play Hero with Sword and EyeToy Camera	**PS2**
7	Gauntlet	**DS**
7	Guinness Book of Records	**DS, Wii**
7	LittleBigPlanet *[Pre-order for R699.95. Save R100!]*	**PS3**
7	Lost in the Blue 3: Shipwrecked	**Wii**
7	Mechanic Master	**DS**
7	More Game Party	**Wii**
7	Moto GP	**Multi**
7	Naruto: Ultimate Ninja Storm	**PS3**
7	PES 09: Pro Evolution Soccer	**PS2, PSP**
7	Pony Friends	**DS**
7	Popstar Guitar	**Wii**
7	Silent Hill: Homecoming	**PC, PS3**
7	Singstar: Singalong with Disney	**PS2**
7	Siren: Blood Curse	**PS3**
7	Star Ocean	**PSP**
7	Tamagotchi 3	**DS**
7	Tom Clancy's End War	**Multi**
7	Tom Clancy's End War Collector's Edition	**PS3**
7	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 09	**PS2, PS3, PSP**
7	You're in the Movies	**360**
7	Yugi Oh: GX Tag Force 3	**PSP**
11	All Star Cheer	**DS, Wii**
11	Gears of War 2	**360**
11	Gears of War 2 Limited Edition *[Limited stock available! Pre-order for R677.66]*	**360**
14	Call of Duty: World at War	**Multi**
14	Call of Duty: World at War Collector's Edition *[Limited stock available! Pre-order for R431.06]*	**PC**
14	Call of Duty: World at War Collector's Edition *[Limited stock available. Pre-order for R690.26]*	**360**
14	Disney Think Fast!	**Wii, PS2**
14	Final Fantasy: Chocobo's Dragon	**Wii**
14	Guitar Hero on Tour 2	**DS**
14	Monster Lab	**DS, Wii, PS2**
14	PES 09: Pro Evolution Soccer	**360**
14	Scene It 2	**360**
14	Shellshock 2	**PC, PS3, 360**
14	Star Wars Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	**DS, Wii**
21	Alone in the Dark	**PS3**
21	Buzz: Brainbender	**PSP**
21	GTA 4 *[Pre-order for R299.95. Save R50]*	**PC**
21	Guitar Hero World Tour	**Multi**
21	Guitar Hero World Tour Super Bundle	**Multi**
21	High School Musical 3 - Senior Year: Dance	**Multi**
21	LIPS	**360**
21	MK vs DC Universe	**PS3, 360**
21	More Touch Master	**DS**
21	Need for Speed Undercover *[Pre-Order and stand a chance to win a remote control car valued at R1,000]*	**Multi**
21	Rapala Fishing Frenzy with Rod	**Wii**
21	Rayman Raving Rabbids TV	**DS, Wii**
21	Shaun White Snowboarding	**Multi**
21	Singstar: ABBA	**PS2, PS3**
21	Singstar: Volume 3	**PS3**
21	Tony Hawk's Motion	**DS**
21	Valkyria Underworld	**PS3**
28	Barbie Fashion Show: An Eye for Style	**DS, PC**
28	Barbie Horse Adventure: Summer Camp	**Multi**
28	Disney Fairies: Tinkerbell	**DS**
28	Football Manager 09	**PC, PSP**
28	Halo 3 Recon	**360**
28	Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warrior	**DS, Wii**
28	Madagascar 2: Escape 2 Africa	**Multi**
28	Naruto: The Broken Bond	**360**
28	Sonic Unleased	**Multi**
28	Tomb Raider Underworld	**Multi**
TBA	Bully	**PC**
TBA	Celebrity Sports Showdown	**Wii**
TBA	Disney Sing It! High School Musical 3	**Wii, PS2, PS3**
TBA	Facebreaker	**Wii**
TBA	Hasbro Family Game Night	**Wii, PS2**
TBA	Left 4 Dead	**PC, 360**
TBA	Mirror's Edge *[Pre-order and stand a chance to win a Mirror's Edge bag]*	**PC, PS3, 360**
TBA	Silent Hill: Homecoming	**360**
TBA	Skate It	**DS, Wii**
TBA	The Lord of the Rings: Conquest	**Multi**

NEED FOR SPEED
UNDERCOVER
21.11.08
Pre-order and stand a chance to win a remote control car valued at R1000!

THIS DAY IN GAMING: NOVEMBER

1
(2002) Ensemble releases *Age of Mythology*; ancient warfare never looked this good.

2

3

4

5

6

7
(LAN) MPLD November 2008 (Pretoria)
www.langames.co.za

8
(LAN) Bethlehem LAN (Bethlehem)
(LAN) TaylorMade LAN (Cape Town)
www.langames.co.za

9

10
(2002) *Resident Evil 0* hits the GameCube; gamers are blown away by the console's graphical capabilities.

11
(1995) Tabletop gaming enters the videogame market with *Warhammer: Shadow of the Horned Rat*.

12

13
(1996) Tom Clancy co-founds Red Storm Entertainment; tactical strategy games are reborn.

14
(LAN) xlf 200-man LAN (no venue specified)
www.langames.co.za

15
(1996) The first *Tomb Raider* is released. Ladies and gentlemen; Lara Croft has entered the building.

16
(2000) *Sacrifice* is released; genres clash in an epic struggle, but the game goes by largely unnoticed.

21
(LAN) Organised Chaos (no venue specified)
www.langames.co.za

22
(LAN) Mayhem Nov (Boksburg)
www.langames.co.za

26
(1999) *Unreal Tournament* is released; it beats *Quake III* to the shelves by just ten days.

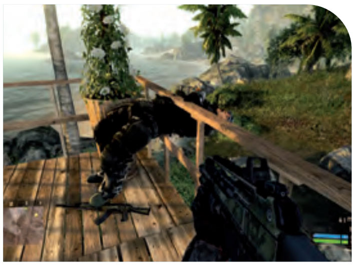
28
(LAN) ABOMINATION LAN (Benoni)
(LAN) Vendetta (Durban)
(LAN) The Merriment LAN (Pretoria)
www.langames.co.za

29

30
(1990) SEGA releases the Mega Drive in Europe; 16-bit gaming explodes, Japan is so over it by then.

CAPTION OF THE MONTH

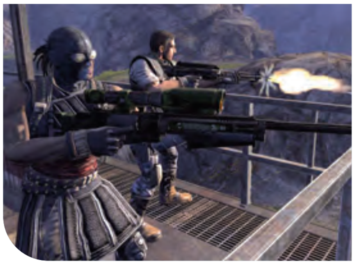
Every month we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**November Caption**].



NOVEMBER CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT:
Kim be limbo, Kim be quick, Kim go unda limbo stick

vivendi GAMES



OCTOBER WINNER

No dude, I wear the kilt because the gun in my hand isn't my biggest weapon!
Dave Loubser

RULES: (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things. (3) Obey all posted speed limits. (4) Never run with scissors. (5) There is no spoon. (6) Don't tell me what I can't do!

BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a screenshot, on a piece of hardware or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to **ed@nag.co.za** with the subject line [**November Badger**]. We'll announce a random winner next month and that person will win a limited-edition Badger T-shirt from Gamer Gear.

www.rudra.co.za

LAST MONTH'S WINNER
Luciano, p25

Nokia N96
The web. Now made by hand.
Most Viewed
Back
Menu
YouTube
CNN YouTube Debates
Experiment
05:20
Hahaha
01:40
Potter Puppet Pals in ...
02:06
1:50 PM
Options
NOKIA
N96
ZEISS
Carl Zeiss Optics
N-GAGE
nokia.maps

Miktar's Meanderings

by Miktar Dracon

Don't Have A Holy Cow, Man.

PEOPLE CARE TOO MUCH what other people do. They must be unhappy with what they're doing, since satisfied people are too busy being satisfied to go around judging what others are doing.

Satire in a videogame is a special place, partly because a videogame is interactive. When a game is a satire, the viewer is a participant. As such, games can get away with things passive entertainment can't even imagine. Violent games are a good example. If a game has the heatshotz [sic], it's already controversial. Add satire, and it reaches a completely new level. *Duke Nukem 3D* was such a guilty, satirical pleasure garbed in action-pants pulled up over self-referential poking for the 'lulz' before the 'lulz' even existed. Violent madness, sociopathic interactivity (and stripper-tipping) offset only in that the cops were alien pig monsters and not realistic police people and the strippers had pixel boobs.

The one thing Duke didn't do was ripping off the head of religion and defecate down its neck. Not even Duke was that badass. Outside of gaming, there is no end to the abuse God, Jesus and other various Christian faith symbols have endured in the name of comedy or satire. As it stands, certain religions think they are exempt from such mockery and shenanigans. Heaven forbid anyone poking fun at Muhammad, Allah or Muslims. Even *Family Guy*, *South Park* and *American Dad* tiptoe around the issue when it comes to the no-fly zone over the humour land of Islam.

Along came *Muslim Massacre* and its straight poke into a dark satirical eye, showing American International Policy for what it is: that giving a teenager infinite ammunition can solve anything. The game itself had tiny pixel people (Muslims) being shot by a tiny pixel person (an American). Boss battles include Osama Bin Laden, Muhammad and Allah. Oh the bad taste! Oh the humanity! No advancement in humour ever came from respect, hugs and kisses. Everyone is offended at some point – it may as well be the epitaph to the Internet (when it finally rolls over and dies from acute teenage/media idiocy): "Here Lies The Internet: Everyone Was Offended For Fifteen Minutes."

The brave soul behind *Muslim Massacre* caved in after only a week of abuse from the sensationalist media and knee-jerk reactionaries who threatened to jihad his view of Muslims as people who *jihad* to get their way. The Website was removed and a bleeding-heart apology given to all those who lack the mental faculties to understand context.

After all, if it's not a big-budget game calling you to duty, it's not okay to shoot thousands of turban-wearing Muslims... sorry, terrorists.

Perhaps the real rhubarb-custard behind the rhubarb-custard regarding *Muslim Massacre* is that of the religious icons. "They're sacred, SACRED," scream the religious caste. Did you know that people make things sacred? It's because they want them to have meaning. They don't realise that the only true way for anything to have any meaning is for nothing to be sacred. Making something sacred is to place it in a box where it's sealed off and it dies, so people go around worshiping corpses.

Even gamers are still mostly conditioned to say, "Duh, it's just a game." But game design is another legitimate form of expression. It is disturbing to see a game designer self-censor (as it would be to see a director or writer cower in fear for what people might think).

Enough with the moral panic. When people believe something is dangerous to the stability of the fabric of society or social stability, they enter a state of general panic caused by moral outrage. They become offended. They believe that the thing, left unchecked, will threaten their very lives. Some people even live in a totally fictional reality designed to support their fear and paranoia over an offensive topic. "Don't let them gays kiss, it'll create more queers." People gripped by moral panic don't want to talk about the taboo topic due to the basic psychological tendency to confabulate cause and effect: talking about something 'evil' causes 'evil' to happen or to become more real. It's called magical thinking. Stop it.

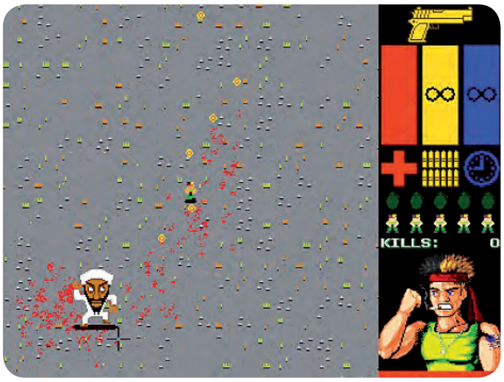
It is possible to be offended about something you care about without being personally offended. It requires a degree of objectivity. You can be offended by information being misrepresented. People who only know how to take things personally have trouble with satire and humour, because they don't grasp the emotional level how, say, a cartoon of Jesus selling toilets is not an attempt to convince people that Jesus sold crap. Literal-mindedness is related to how easily offended someone is.

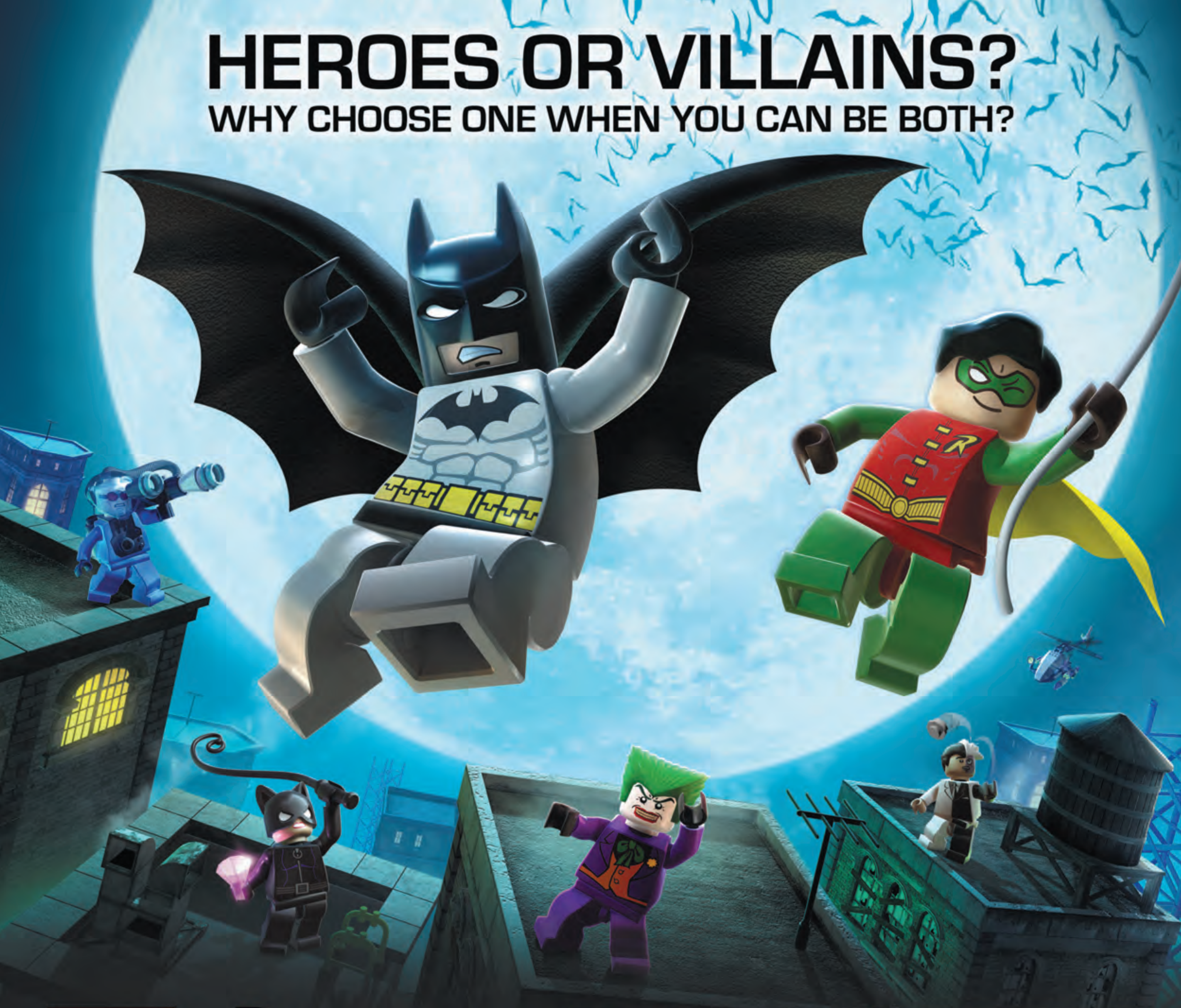
Being offended is the burden of the person being offended, not the person doing the offending.

The creator of *Muslim Massacre* did nothing wrong other than to fall prey to the sensationalist media and outraged moral busybodies who give power to the exact things they are outraged at by not shutting up. If you don't like what someone is saying, don't invite them to your parties.

Or as Duke might say, "Let God sort 'em out!" **NAG**

> Even gamers are still mostly conditioned to say, "Duh, it's just a game." But game design is another legitimate form of expression. It is disturbing to see a game designer self-censor (as it would be to see a director or writer cower in fear for what people might think).




HEROES OR VILLAINS?
WHY CHOOSE ONE WHEN YOU CAN BE BOTH?

Dammit

by Megan Hughes

Fair Exchange

TAKE SEVERAL INSTANT MESSAGE severs, add a dash of opinionated gamers, and ask the question: "Are games overpriced or not?" Serving suggestion: do not try this at home. Results will vary, but most likely will include several complicated arguments (often backed up by a number of graphs, tables and/or quotes) that all, without a doubt, contradict one another.

Realising, one headache later, that this was probably not the best course of action if I wanted to get any concrete answer and not just a plethora of questions, I decided that a new tactic was necessary.

Personally, and just between you and me, I love working with numbers. Give me calculus, geometry and trigonometry any day. It is a whole lot easier that coming up with 800 words every month (and not just any words, mind you, but ones that make coherent sentences to form logical arguments of all things). Not that I don't absolutely love having this page with my name at the top for which they actually pay me. However, I digress.

Having this particular fascination with numbers, as well as their relation to one another, I decided that the next logical step to discover the answer to my question would be to compare the figures for game sales with that of another huge entertainment industry: the film industry. Two hours later, and following the advice that it is always better to "keep the apples in the orchard," I gave up. The film industry, it seems, works in a way that is just so different to the games industry that comparing them is impossible. The games industry might have made double what the film industry made in 2007, but there is no way to account for the huge DVD sale and rental market.

New approach: compare apples with apples (using a ten-year time scale, because I can). Nearly five hours later, and I had yet to find any listed prices for anything as of 1998 (barring petrol and, strangely enough, vodka), let alone games. And then the penny dropped. Why do the work if you can get others to do it for you? With some luck, I managed to convince a few *NAG* readers* on the forums to dig up some of their oldest *NAG* magazine copies and list the prices for various games on PC and various PlayStations (simply because the other consoles either became complicated or haven't been around for that long).

As it turns out, back in 1998, you would be paying around R299 for *StarCraft* and R349 for *Commandos* on the PC, while *Dead or Alive* for the PlayStation cost R399 and *Vigilante 8* R459. But these numbers are pretty meaningless until we throw in a few more. Petrol, back in 1998, cost about R2.30 a litre. Since then, it has increased (mostly because of the America-Iraq issues) by around 334.7% to its current price of nearly R10 a litre.

PC games, on the other hand, have increased by between 0% and 50% in ten years, with *Age of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* costing only R299 and *Spore* (without all the frills) R450. While Sony upgraded from the first PlayStation to the current seventh-generation console, the PS3, PlayStation games saw an increase of between 75% to 100%, with *Haze* at R699 and *Turning Point: Fall of Liberty* at R799.

So, what does this all mean? Well, it could indicate a number of things. Firstly, we may have been so seriously overcharged for games back in '98 that it wasn't necessary to up the prices much in years. One could also look at the figures and conclude that games are much cheaper now, relatively, than they've been before, simply because with inflation and such we should all be earning a whole lot more than what we would have back in 1998. It could also be said that we're getting more (more technology, better graphics, better quality) for the same or just a slightly higher price, which seems fair.

> "It could also be said that we're getting more (more technology, better graphics, better quality) for the same or just a slightly higher price, which seems fair.

Another reason could be that because we're spending all our money on petrol these days, there just isn't any left for purchasing games. Of course, gaming has always been a luxury that not everyone could afford, especially in times that are termed "tough," so maybe instead of complaining about the prices, we should feel humbled by the fact that you and I are more blessed than most. **NAG**

*Thanks –Bouncer-, James Donaldson, Kharrak, Lysis and spid3r.

Design by Smart Ideas
www.smart-ideas.co.za

Ramjet

by Walt Pretorius

Joe, Bob and Larry

SOMETIMES I WONDER HOW human nature affects modern society. I wonder, for example, about the instinctual need to protect that which belongs to us, while others have the instinctual urge to take what is ours. If it weren't for concepts like money, supply and demand and general financial type stuff, we'd all be bashing each other over the head with all manner of simple implements, just to get what belongs to the other guy.

During these bouts of wondering, I often get confused. It would seem that, despite this careful system of "You can have my stuff in exchange for your stuff" – or, more accurately, money – there still seems to be something of a breakdown. I am not talking about crime, because criminals shouldn't be measured by the rules and tenets of normal people. They don't really count as people, in my book, because they just don't have the capacity to function within the system. But, then again, the people I am talking about are criminals, because that's exactly what they are doing... I am getting confused again.

What sparked this whole thing is the recent debacle surrounding the draconian DRM used by Electronic Arts to control *Spore*. They used the much-maligned SecuROM system, I believe, and from what little I know, it's a pretty nasty move. But, let's look at it from the other side: they are protecting what is theirs, aren't they?

Let's simplify this even more. Let's say a guy, we'll call him Joe, has a great idea. Bob, his friend, also thinks it's a great idea. Joe wants to use his idea to make money, which is his right. Should his idea be good enough, and Bob and a whole lot of other people want it, then Joe deserves to be rewarded. However, Bob doesn't want to pay for Joe's idea. Instead, he steals it, meaning that Joe is now out of pocket*. Bob takes it even further - he starts giving Joe's idea to everyone else, free of charge, based on a principle that he invented to justify his harming of Joe. Let's say Joe already has lots of money, and Bob uses that to justify that Joe doesn't need any more money, and that the idea should be given away for free. It sounds noble, but at the root of it is still the fact that Bob still doesn't want to pay Joe for the idea. Many a criminal act has been cloaked in a cause.

So Joe decides that he needs to protect his idea, before another Bob comes along. He buys a pit bull, which bites the next Bob who tries to con Joe out of money. Bob 2, let's call him Larry, complains bitterly that he has been wronged, because Bob got away with it before. What right does Joe have, he asks, to allow his dog to bite Larry? Bob got away with it.

And so it is with the gaming industry. Big companies like EA use these DRM tools (and don't get me wrong, I don't like SecuROM either) to protect their intellectual property. It is still property, according to the law, and taking someone else's property without compensation is theft. These DRM 'devices' are their burglar bars and alarm systems. But the burglars are complaining. Wow. That's actually quite rich.

This goes further than just the *Spore* debacle, which has a few extenuating circumstances that I am not going to go into right here. It's about the concept of piracy. Piracy is theft, pure and simple. It's a fact, and if you are a pirate, you are a criminal in my book, and in the eyes of the law... and no amount of cloaking your actions in principle will change that simple truth. Trying to justify a wrongdoing doesn't change its nature. **NAG**

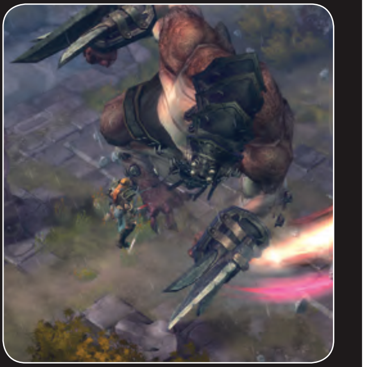
[*Now, if Joe gets off the train at the second station, how many apples will Bob need to eat before Larry gets on the westbound train? Ed]

> If it weren't for concepts like money, supply and demand and general financial type stuff, we'd all be bashing each other over the head with all manner of simple implements, just to get what belongs to the other guy.

WHAT WE WANT

POW! KER-NAG!!

This month, we bring you a new and improved What We Want section. Just like the What We're Playing section in Reviews, we've surveyed the *NAG* staff to find out what games we just can't wait to get our clammy little paws on! It's democracy in action!



Rank	Game	Score
1	Diablo III	13
2	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War II	10
2	Prey 2	10
4	F.E.A.R. 2: Project Origin	9
4	Resident Evil 5	9
4	Prince of Persia	9
7	StarCraft 2	6
8	Dragon Age: Origins	5
8	MDK for PS3	5
8	The Sims 3	5
8	Fable 2	5
8	Majesty 2: The Fantasy Kingdom Sim	5
8	The next Battlefield	5
8	Borderlands	5
15	Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	4
15	Empire: Total War	4
15	Duke Nukem Forever	4
18	Prototype	3
18	Dungeon Keeper 3	3
18	LittleBigPlanet	3
21	Final Fantasy XIII	2
21	Anno 1404	2
21	Aliens: Colonial Marines	2
21	A new Carmageddon game	2
25	Divinity 2: Ego Draconis	1
25	Demigod	1
25	Postal III	1
25	Geometry Wars 3	1

NB: Games due to be released in November aren't included in this list. By the time you're reading this, we should have them!

DIVINITY 2: EGO DRACONIS

Developer→ Larian Studios | **Publisher→** DTP Entertainment | **Genre→** RPG | **Release Date→** Q2 2009

THE SEQUEL TO *DIVINE* *Divinity*, *Divinity 2: Ego Draconis* casts the player as a rookie dragon slayer looking to make their mark on the world of Rivellon. The game has a variety of interesting concepts: characters are classless, so the type of character you'll play is largely up to what skills and abilities you choose to invest in. Early in the game, players are given a 'battle tower' that will serve as a base of operations between quests. This tower can be fully utilised by the player by recruiting inhabitants who will stay in the tower and perform certain tasks. Each of these inhabitants has their own unique ability, such as the ability to perform alchemy or enchant items. Another interesting feature is the ability to recruit runners, who will head out and find items for you. You'll need to equip these guys with armour and weapons to ensure that they can survive some of your more eccentric requests (sending them out to find a high-level item involves some risk). Some of the powers that player characters are able to wield are not of the type that you'd usually expect to see in a typical RPG, such as the ability to read minds. Despite the main character being a dragon slayer, once it becomes powerful enough, it'll be able to transform into a dragon. This game is definitely looking interesting (to say the least) and hopefully it'll provide many hours of enjoyment for RPG fans once it's released. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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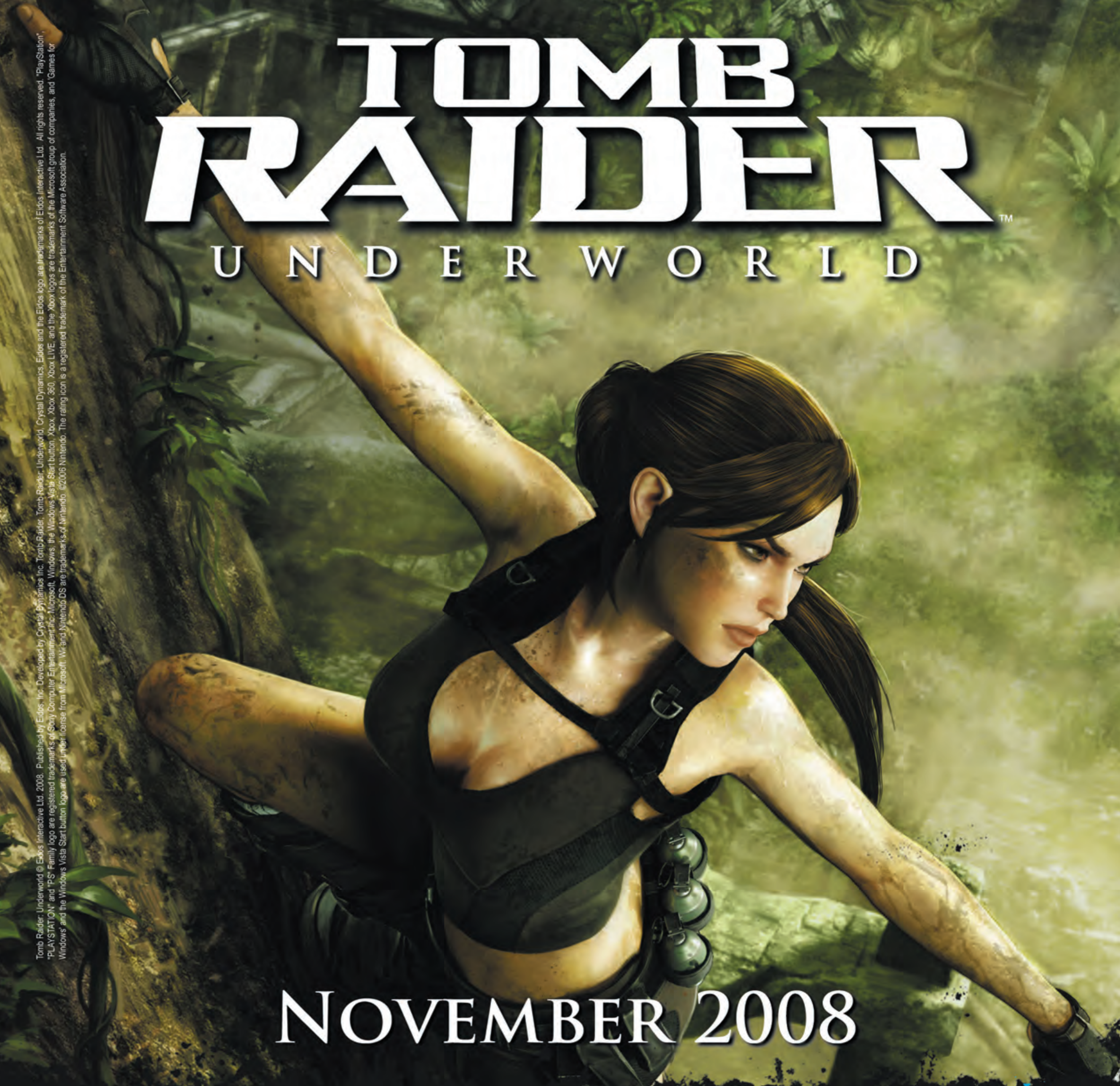
TOMB RAIDER™
UNDERWORLD
NOVEMBER 2008

THAILAND

This level has a very good mix of puzzling, platform gaming and gunplay that'll see you searching for artefacts required to progress through this visually impressive area. An array of enemies seek to make life difficult in these dangerous jungles with its spiders, tigers, bats and giant lizards standing in the way of your tomb-raiding fun. (The giant lizards are supposedly lizard men, or "Naga," but they looked like ordinary lizards to us, apart from the "giant" part. These models are subject to change, however, so perhaps they will be replaced by lizard men). Speaking of giant lizards, these enemies make for some interesting confrontations, as they can freely traverse walls and ceilings: an ability that often makes staying alive very difficult since they'll often knock you from walls you're climbing before you've even spotted them. Being pried off a wall, only to fall to your last save point, is often a major buzz kill, so picking these lizards off before engaging in any acrobatic shenanigans is highly recommended. This level also shows off some incredibly inventive puzzles, including one particularly fiendish puzzle that takes place in multiple locations scattered around one central hub. Sources indicate that these kinds of puzzles will feature prominently throughout *Underworld*, meaning that players will have to work through multiple areas containing smaller brain-twisters to solve a single, larger puzzle.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION...

Unfortunately, the preview copy we received only featured the first two levels of the game, set in the Mediterranean Sea and coastal Thailand (along with a short introductory sequence set in Lara's mansion, which is aflame and slowly burning to the ground). From what was on offer, it looks as though this new *Tomb Raider* will offer a plethora of varied and exciting (not to mention epic) locations and environments - an absolute must for any game starring Lara Croft.

Developer→ Crystal Dynamics | **Publisher→** Eidos Interactive | **Genre→** Action Adventure | **Release Date→** November 2008

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HANDS ON
TESTED

I'M NOT GOING TO waffle on about *Tomb Raider*'s sketchy past and its subsequent reimagining in the hands of Crystal Dynamics. That's been done far too many times and I think it's safe to say that Lara Croft definitely stars in what is once again one of the best gaming series around today. While *Underworld* is not a total overhaul, it is definitely a major improvement, and Crystal Dynamics is proving that they are determined to take the *Tomb Raider* franchise to new heights [***or levels, ;) Ed***].

Much like *Anniversary, Underworld*'s focus is on raiding tombs. Based on what we saw in the preview copy of the game, less emphasis has been placed on combat and more has been placed on exploration. While conventional (and non-conventional) enemies still play a role in the game, Lara's pistols are very rarely removed from their holsters, and when they are, the foes you'll face are more often than not wild animals and creepy critters rather than guys packing heat. This is in no way a bad thing though. After all, this is what *Tomb Raider* is really all about: exploring the unexplored, charting the uncharted. Therefore, the enemies you encounter are the type of enemies you'd expect to see in areas that have never been touched by humankind before, or at least haven't been disturbed by a human presence in centuries. In most cases, the true enemy is your environment, filled with perils and pitfalls that threaten to leave Lara limp and lifeless if she so much as takes an ill-timed jump. The environments are absolutely gorgeous (see the box out elsewhere for a slightly more in-depth look at the environments) and it seems as though there will be plenty of variation in the scenery when playing the final game. Being able to explore these unique environments is part of what gives the *Tomb Raider* series its charm, and the developers are really taking this to heart.

You can definitely expect to see plenty of mind-bending puzzles littering the locations in the final game. The puzzles we experienced playing through the preview code forced us to use every inch of our grey matter to solve them, and often we'd be stuck in one area for what seemed like forever, literally with no clue what to do next, when suddenly we'd have an epiphany, realising what was required of us and went about the business of swinging

THE MEDITERRANEAN

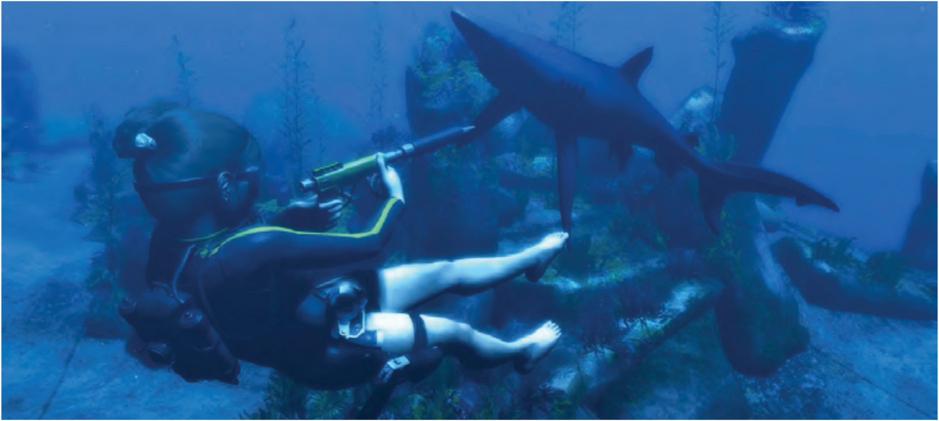
In stark contrast to the Thai level, the level set in the Mediterranean is dark, dank and claustrophobic. Starting out on the deck of Lara's boat, you'll have to descend into the inky depths of the ocean and find your way into the underwater caverns nested in a sunken landmass. This level doesn't feature much in terms of enemies aside from a handful of sharks you'll have to contend with very early on, and an entertaining romp above and below the deck of a ship bristling with human foes (this little sequence occurs at the end of the level, once you've exited the underwater labyrinth). At its core, this level is all about puzzles, well-timed jumps and platform hopping, and it shows that a man with a firearm is far less terrifying than a death-defying leap into the unknown in the hope that Lara will have something to hold onto that will prevent her from falling to her doom. One of the obstacles in this area is a gargantuan octopus/squid-like creature (according to reports, it is a "Kraken"), which is preventing you from proceeding. This once again shows the focus on exploration and puzzle solving rather than combat, since this enemy is not defeated using conventional weapons, but rather by using the environment to neutralise the threat. It's clearly visible that the ocean is slowly trying to break its way into these caverns, with a good deal of the level taking place either underwater or in areas that have been partially flooded. Water slowly streams down the walls, leaving much of the level glistening as the natural light shines upon this adventurer's paradise. It's beautiful to behold and thanks to the fact that there is very little combat, you feel alone (every step that you take is leading you farther and farther into uncharted territory).

on poles, balancing on balance beams and whatever else it took so that we could proceed onward to the next doubtlessly awe-inspiring area. One of the reasons we love *Tomb Raider* so much is because of the sense of accomplishment you feel when you manage to finish a puzzle sequence or get through a seemingly impossible situation, simply using Lara's acrobatic skill. This facet of the game remains intact (judging by what we saw in the preview copy) and there is nothing else quite like the feeling you get when reaching the end of a particularly tough level.

In truth, the game doesn't seem to have changed much aside from the improved visuals and a few new abilities that Lara has at her disposal. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is up for debate, since the new locations and more complex puzzles that were on display definitely had us pleased. In terms of story, it seems that Lara is focusing on Norse mythology this time around (the main focus seems to be Lara's eagerness to get her hands on Thor's hammer). It definitely seems as if the story is going to be a huge reason to play through this game once it is released. We like great stories in our games, so that's fine by us. Players can also expect to see a few familiar faces along the way, such as Jacqueline Natla and Lara's buddy Zip. The interactive cut-scenes from *Legend*, which required specific button presses to get Lara out of tight situations, are not present in *Underworld*. They have been replaced by 'adrenaline moments', during which time slows down (read: bullet time initiates) to allow Lara to quickly manoeuvre out of danger. An example of this is one scene where Lara falls down into a seemingly endless pit, causing time

JIGGLE WITH IT

Lara is looking better (i.e. sexier) than ever. She's been remodelled once again and she is definitely at her leanest and most agile in this latest *Tomb Raider* title (however, she does still retain the... ahem... more realistic proportions that were introduced in *Legend* and *Anniversary*). The general opinion at *NAG* is that the developers have drawn some inspiration from Angelina Jolie, modelling this new-look Lara to tout some of Miss Jolie's more prominent features. The way Ms Croft moves has to be seen to be believed: she's graceful and her agility is truly shown off as she moves through the game's levels. She is affected by the environment as she jumps, rolls and climbs. Water drips off Lara and her skin glistens after she goes for a quick swim, and she even gets covered in dirt as she does what she does (and said dirt is subsequently washed off when Lara takes a dip in water). While moving through the foliage of Thailand, Lara will push leaves and branches away as she moves past them. These actions are mostly cosmetic, but they do serve to make the world more believable and realistic.



to slow down and it is required of the player to fire Lara's grappling hook towards an attachment point so she can safely swing onto a nearby ledge before she falls too deep into the abyss. These moments are actually quite stylish and because complete control of Lara is never taken away from the player, they make for a far more exciting experience than the aforementioned interactive cut-scenes.

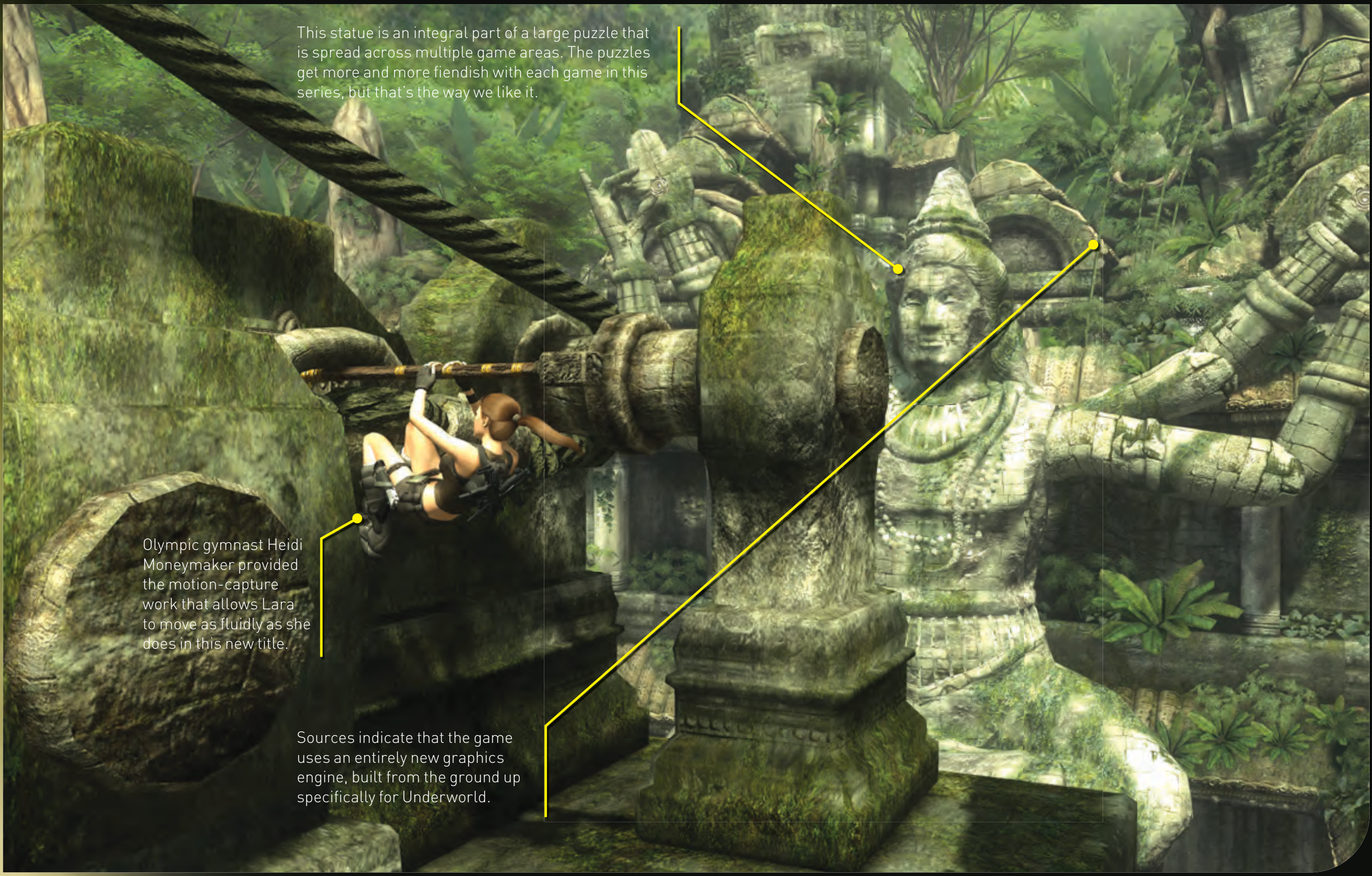
Some of the game mechanics that had been touted by the developers weren't in place in our preview copy. Things such as weather affecting Lara's ability to move around as nimbly as she usually would weren't present in the levels available. There is a chance that certain features we'd heard about in the past may have been dropped or hadn't been implemented yet in the preview code we received, so you'll have

EXTRA JIGGLE

Apparently, the Xbox 360 version of the game will feature exclusive downloadable content, in the form of two extra chapters that will offer an additional six hours of play (approximately). You can thank Microsoft and Eidos for negotiating this deal.

to wait for a full review to hear our opinion on these. However, in the meantime, we can tell you that the latest game in this renowned series is very likely to top every other *Tomb Raider* experience that has come before. The game is looking fantastic: Lara has a great new look, the game is built on a brand new (visually incredible) game engine, the locations are stunning and the focus is once again on exploration. *Tomb Raider* fans will love it and hopefully the game will also draw many new fans to the series, because no gamer should have to say that they've never experienced the pure awesome that is *Tomb Raider*. (I wanted to say here that no gamer should have to go through life never having been touched by Lara Croft, but... Wait, did I just write that out loud?).

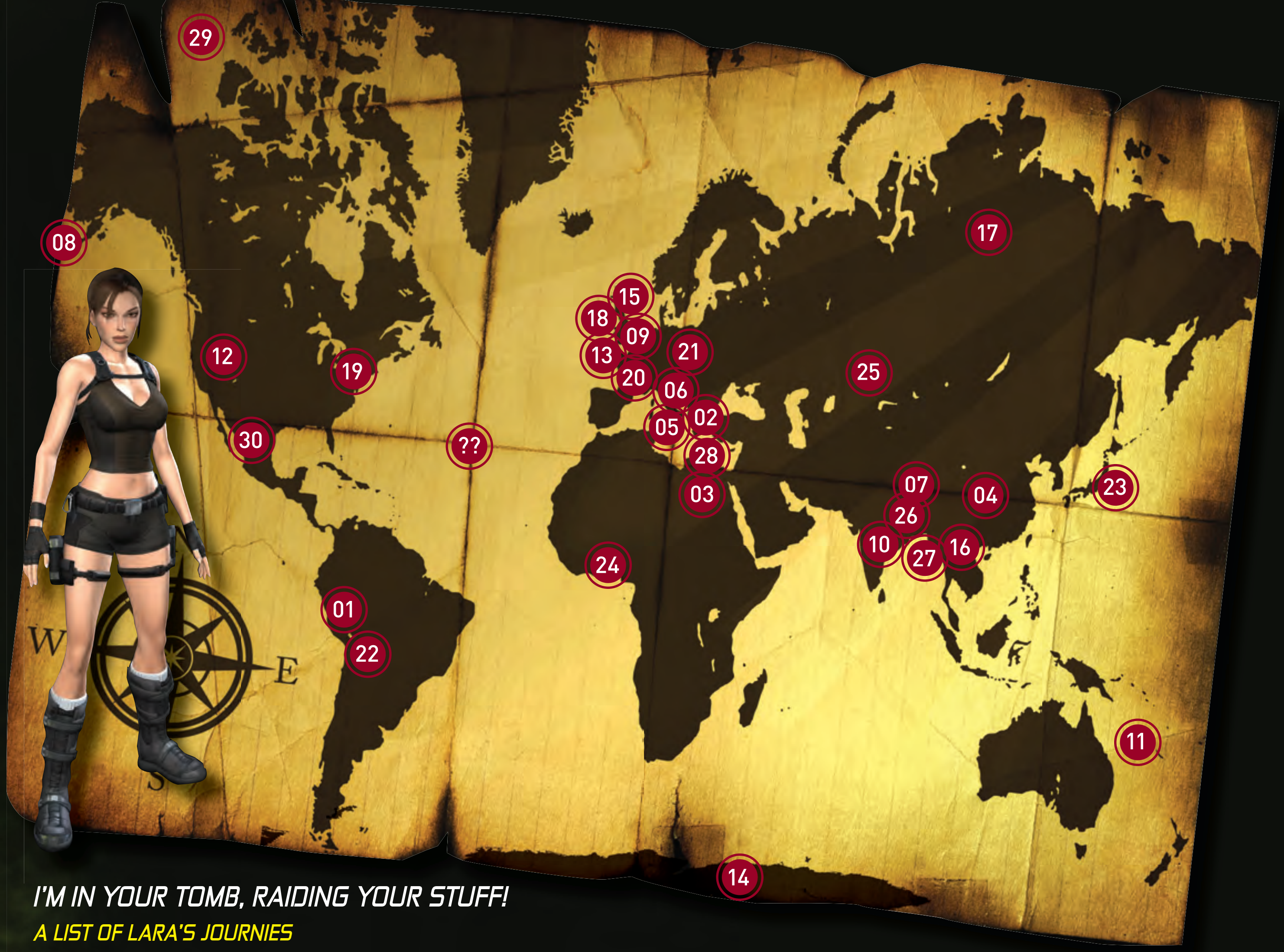
Dane Remendes



This statue is an integral part of a large puzzle that is spread across multiple game areas. The puzzles get more and more fiendish with each game in this series, but that's the way we like it.

Olympic gymnast Heidi Moneymaker provided the motion-capture work that allows Lara to move as fluidly as she does in this new title.

Sources indicate that the game uses an entirely new graphics engine, built from the ground up specifically for Underworld.



I'M IN YOUR TOMB, RAIDING YOUR STUFF!

A LIST OF LARA'S JOURNIES

01 **Location:** Peru – Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider/Tomb Raider: Legend/Tomb Raider: Anniversary

02 **Location:** Greece - St. Francis Monastery
Game: Tomb Raider/Tomb Raider: Anniversary

03 **Location:** Egypt - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider/Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business/Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation/Tomb Raider: The Times Exclusive/Tomb Raider: Anniversary

?? **Location:** Atlantis* - Exact location unknown
Game: Tomb Raider/Tomb Raider: Unfinished Business/Tomb Raider: Anniversary
(* This area was known as the "Lost Island" in Anniversary.)

04 **Location:** China - The Great Wall
Game: Tomb Raider II

05 **Location:** Italy – Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider II/Tomb Raider: Chronicles

06 **Location:** The Adriatic
Game: Tomb Raider II

07 **Location:** Tibet - Barkhang Monastery
Game: Tomb Raider II

08 **Location:** Bering Sea
Game: Tomb Raider II: Golden Mask

09 **Location:** England - Croft Manor
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft/Tomb Raider: Legend/Tomb Raider: Anniversary/Tomb Raider: Underworld

10 **Location:** India - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft

11 **Location:** South Pacific Islands - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft

12 **Location:** Nevada - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft

13 **Location:** England - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft/Tomb Raider: The Lost Artefact/Tomb Raider: Legend/Tomb Raider: Anniversary/Tomb Raider: Underworld

14 **Location:** Antarctica - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider III: Adventures of Lara Croft

15 **Location:** Scotland - Scottish highlands
Game: Tomb Raider III: The Lost Artefact

16 **Location:** Cambodia - Temple of Angkor Wat
Game: Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

17 **Location:** Russia - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider: Chronicles

18 **Location:** Ireland – Exact location unknown
Game: Tomb Raider: Chronicles

19 **Location:** North America - New York
Game: Tomb Raider: Chronicles

20 **Location:** France - Paris
Game: Tomb Raider: The Lost Artefact/Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

21 **Location:** Czech Republic - Prague
Game: Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness

22 **Location:** Bolivia - Tiwanaku
Game: Tomb Raider: Legend

23 **Location:** Japan - Tokyo
Game: Tomb Raider: Legend

24 **Location:** Africa - Ghana
Game: Tomb Raider: Legend

25 **Location:** Kazakhstan - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider: Legend

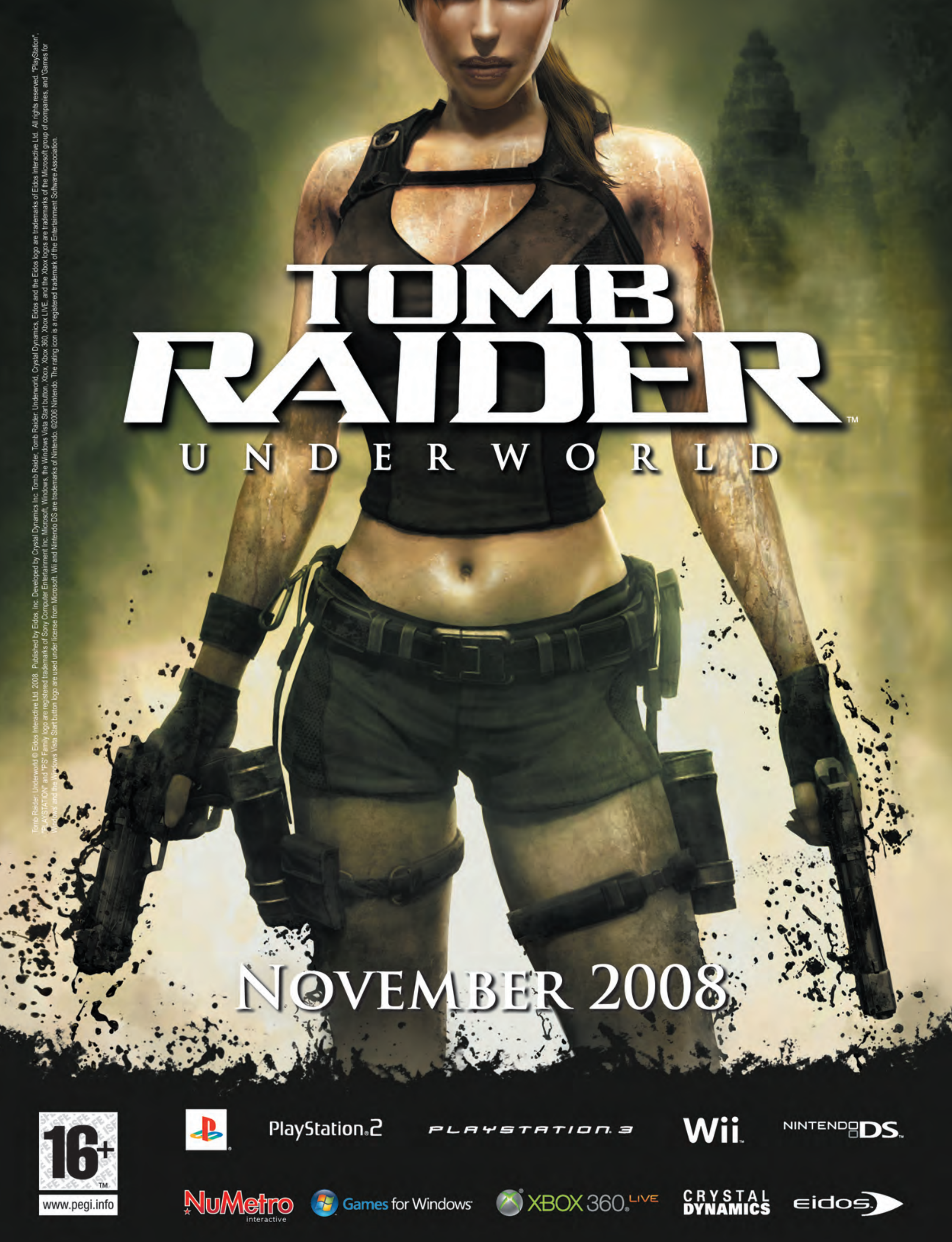
26 **Location:** Nepal - The Himalayas
Game: Tomb Raider: Legend

27 **Location:** Thailand - Various locations
Game: Tomb Raider: Underworld

28 **Location:** The Mediterranean
Game: Tomb Raider: Underworld

29 **Location:** The Arctic Sea
Game: Tomb Raider: Underworld

30 **Location:** Central America - Mexico
Game: Tomb Raider: Underworld **NAG**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PlayStation.2
PLAYSTATION.3
Wii
NINTENDO DS
NuMetro interactive
Games for Windows
XBOX 360 LIVE
CRYSTAL DYNAMICS
eidos

Developer→ Ubisoft Montreal | **Publisher→** Ubisoft | **Genre→** FPS | **Release Date→** October 2008

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FAR CRY 2 UPDATE

A DAY AFTER THE MADNESS of rAge, Ubisoft and local distributor, Megarom, invited us to the bush (Pilanesberg) to chat with Clint Hocking (Creative Director), LP (Louis-Pierre) Pharand (Producer) and Mike Perry (Ubisoft Export Marketing & PR Executive) about *Far Cry 2*. But as we all know, for gamers, just chatting can get boring, so they also hooked up a few Xbox 360 consoles and let us experience the length and breadth of the multiplayer game, gave us a walkthrough of the map editor and also answered any questions we still had about the game. Last, but certainly not least, we also had the opportunity to play a few hours of deathmatch against the development team; and along with the usual insults and fake weapon-jam claims, you could hear the odd journalist shouting out something new, something we've never heard before in a multiplayer game – "Developer kill!" They should have created an achievement for it. Before we carry on, we'd like to thank Clint, LP and Mike for letting us kill them every now and then.

THERE'S MORE!

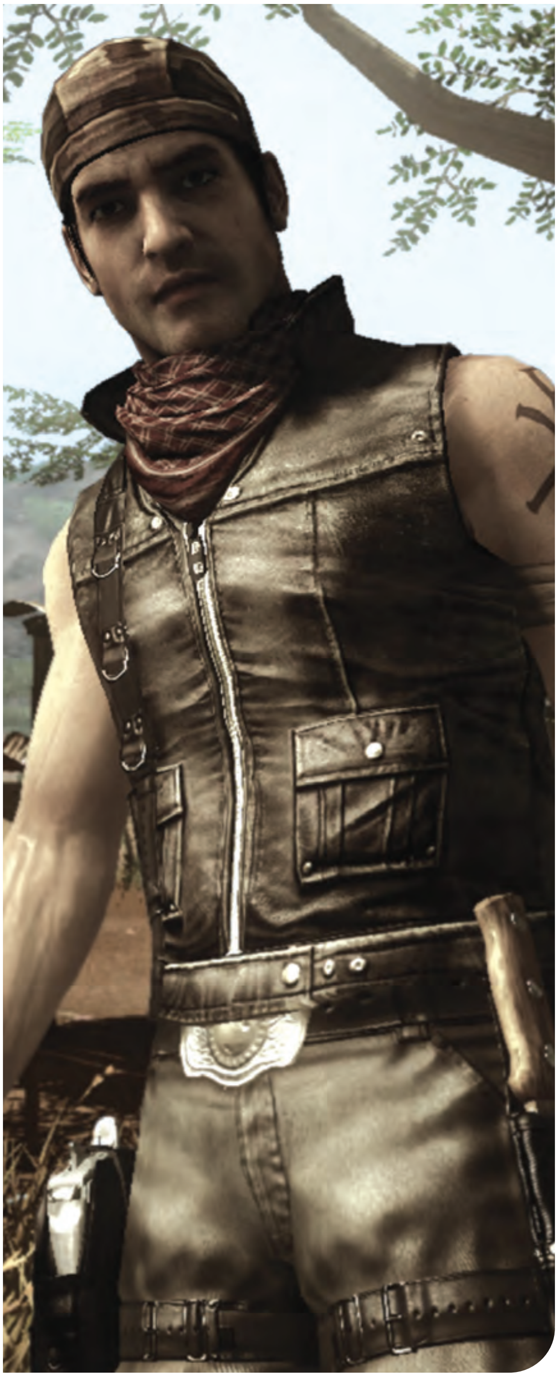
Considering that we've already covered *Far Cry 2* to death in *NAG*, we weren't quite sure exactly what we'd write about going to this press event. In the July 2008 issue, we had a foldout cover and a huge article on the game, and before that a smaller preview and some news snippets. *NAG* as a whole was really just waiting for the review code to arrive, and that would be the end of all the hype and anticipation this game has been creating in its wake for the last year or two. Little did we know…!

Leaving the dumb questions about lions, formats and release dates to the other journalists, we sat down with Clint and LP and talked blood diamonds, weapon jams and end-level bosses.

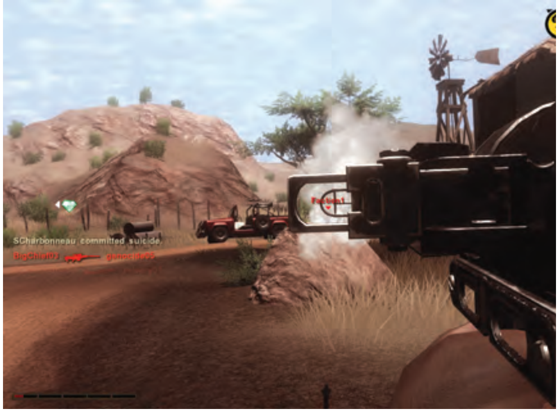
Right from the start, it's clear that Clint and LP are a razor-sharp matchup when it comes to creativity and production. Clint throws around the big ideas and LP makes sure they fit within the development goals of making the game accessible, fun, and straightforward, and within budget. These core goals are something they both work towards, and while everyone thought it would have been awesome to have a few crocodiles lurking in the murky African rivers, LP needs to consider the resource costs involved and relevance when adding 'cool' extras. We asked them about some of the ideas that were thrown out during the early phases of development. First up, there was supposed to be playable female characters; but after they realised they would have to modify thousands of lines of dialogue and replace all references to 'he' and 'him' with 'she' and 'her', the idea was scrapped. One of the other ideas was to include a harpoon gun, perhaps even attached to a vehicle. Naturally, they also considered adding more animals to the game, but the amount of time it would have taken to develop the artificial intelligence and animations for such a small aspect of the overall game also forced them to reconsider. It's certainly interesting to hear about everything that could have been, but the overriding philosophy behind the

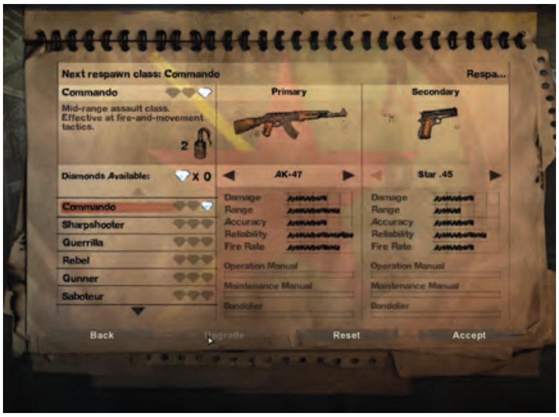
HANDS ON TESTED

What do you mean we're out of crumpets!?



game is to deliver a compelling first-person shooter, with engaging enemies and a deep story: adding a lion, for example, to the African savannah, where only a few people might actually accidentally encounter it wasn't in line with the vision of the game and would have consumed resources that were to be used by other key areas. We also asked them about how they planned on handling the 'boss' battles in the game, considering that there is no eight-headed metal lizard breathing fire at you at key points, but rather just ordinary humans in extraordinary circumstances. Clint was very clear about his distaste for clichéd end-level bosses where you have to wait until a panel opens before you can shoot the molten core to finally bring the enemy down and enjoy the video sequence. Instead, the real 'boss character' you have to overcome in *Far Cry 2* is yourself: your actions and decisions carry weight in the game's story and perhaps it won't be all that easy to put a bullet in the bad guy one day because he might have saved your life earlier. Both Clint and LP were very clear that the wanted to completely immerse the player in the game world, forcing them to think about what they're doing and most importantly, giving them the challenge of deciding what to do. We also spoke about the decision to allow weapons to fail or jam during the game. This play dynamic element was discussed at length by the development team - should they or shouldn't they, would it annoy players when a weapon fails in the middle of combat or would it add to the realism and excitement? A complex equation to analyse - thankfully, weapon reliability was implemented in the final game. The jamming adds a sense of uncertainty to the game and it creates conflict and forces players to think on their feet when fighting. Just like in a real combat situation, a weapon might seize and you'd have to repair it or find another one. In the multiplayer game, the jamming adds to the chaos and challenge; and often while playing or discussing the game afterwards, players would remark that an easy kill had been affected by a weapon jam. It's a great

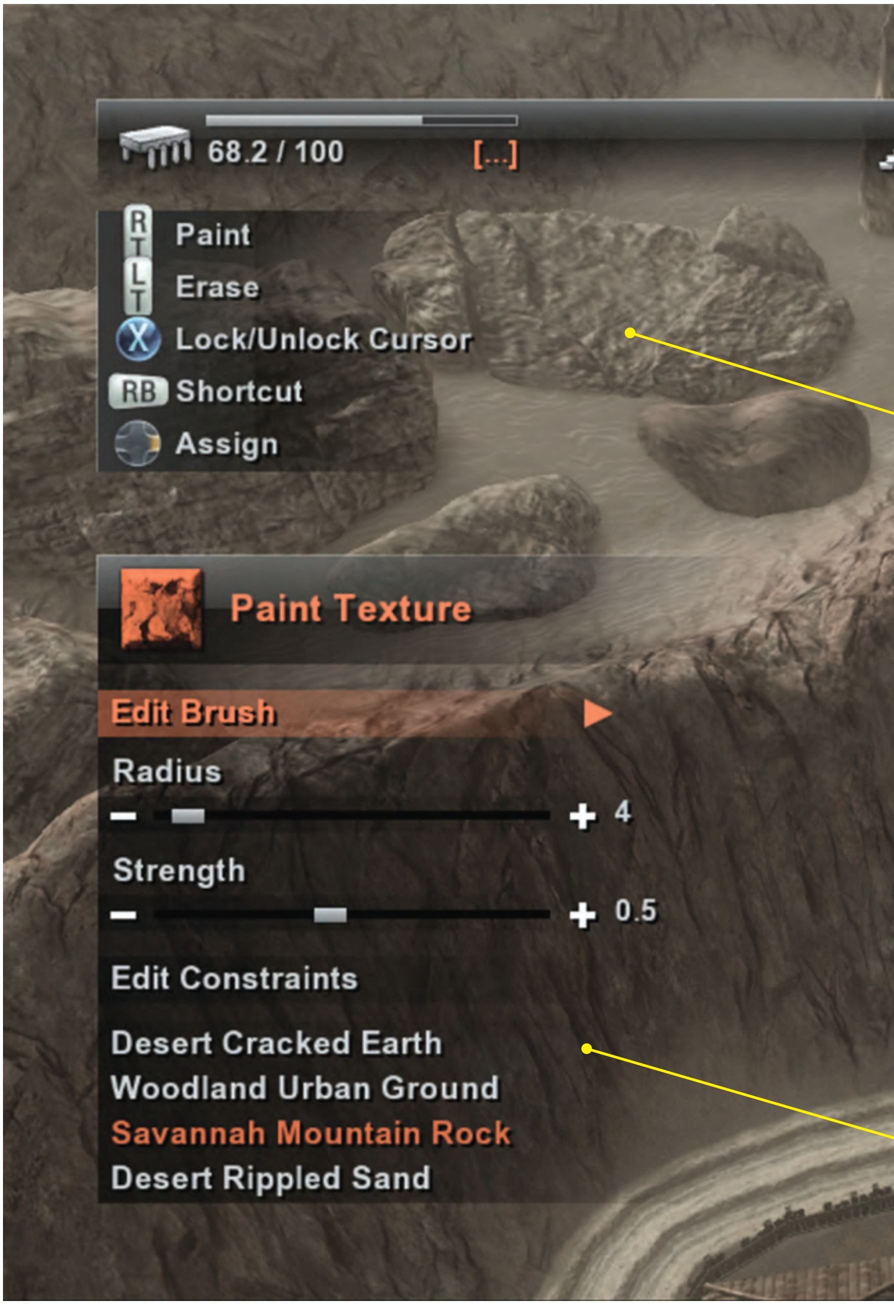

SCharbonneau committed suicide.


Next respawn class: Commando

Commando

Mid-range assault class. Effective at fire-and-movement tactics.

Diamonds Available: X 0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Paint Texture

Edit Brush

Radius 4

Strength 0.5

Edit Constraints

Desert Cracked Earth

Woodland Urban Ground

Savannah Mountain Rock

Desert Rippled Sand

levelling of the odds and only happens infrequently, which adds to the tension.

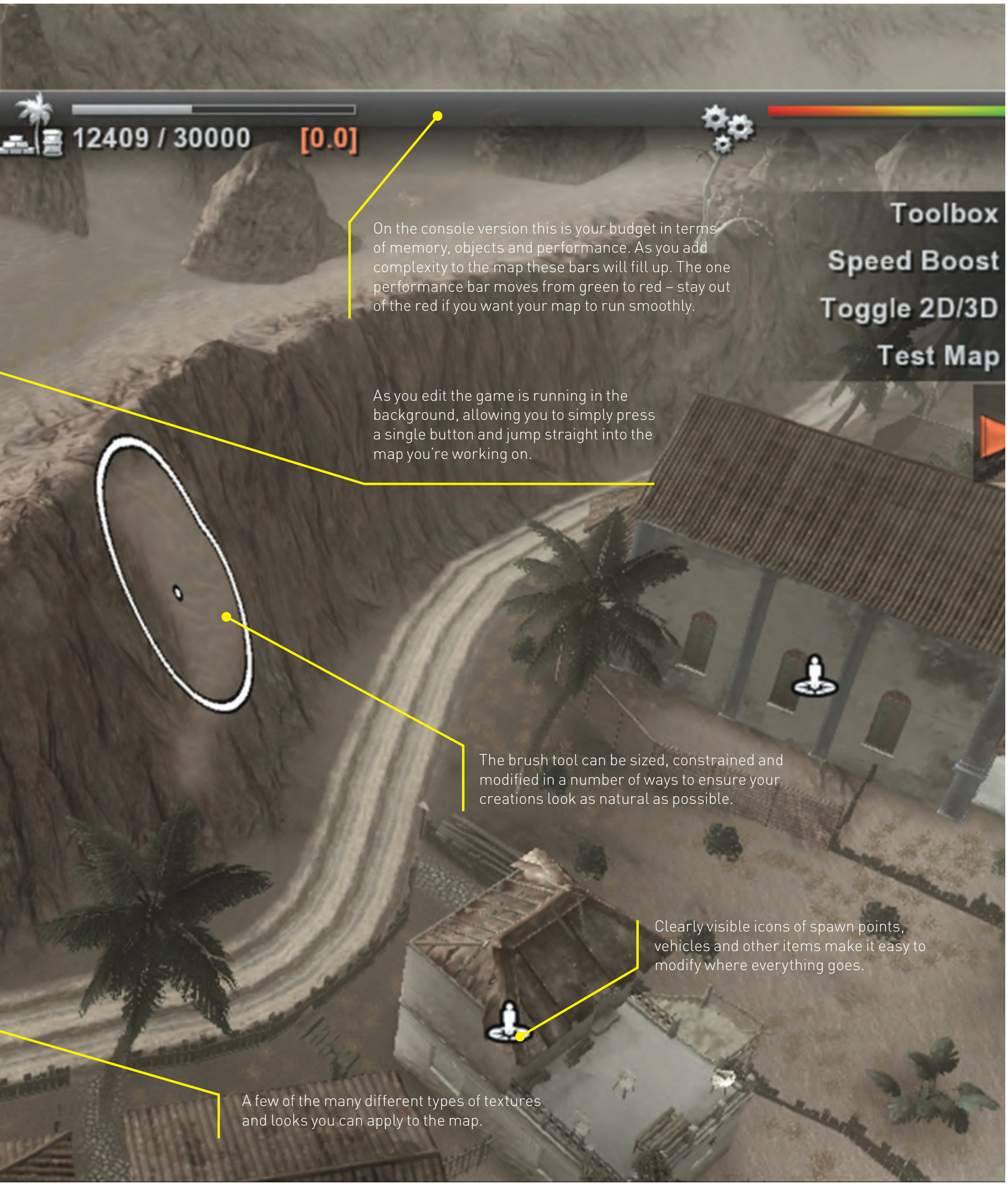
To wrap up, here are a few more things you probably didn't know about *Far Cry 2*: the game was originally going to be called 'Red Harvest'; playing the game from beginning to end will take you around 80 hours; the game has been in development for three and a half years; 174 people worked on the game (55 people on the new engine alone); there is material penetration and the weapons in the game feature realistic specifications, so an AK-47 is more reliable than most weapons; there will be four different difficulty modes; and there are over thirty weapons in the game (all based on their real-life counterparts). Phew!

MULTIPLAYER

We don't have much space left, so here's a quick look at the important bits. The multiplayer element has four game types, DM, TDM, Capture the Diamond (go on, guess) and Uprising (control-point capturing). As you play, you'll earn experience and each time you level up, you'll get a diamond to spend on upgrades. Upgrades unlock new weapons and abilities. There are six classes to choose from, ranging from a Commando (assault), to a Sharpshooter (sniper), to a Gunner (heavy). The actual game mechanics, classes and modes are all from the original gaming textbook, but *Far Cry 2* has a few aces here and there that will win favour with the online community. As usual, predicting how successful a game's multiplayer component will be is close to impossible, so we'll just have to see how this one plays out in the field. *Far Cry 2*'s multiplayer compares well with *Battlefield: Bad Company* for fun and variation, while staying away from the more serious *Call of Duty* games. It's a fun game to play with flamethrowers, Molotov Cocktails and weapon jams adding to the mix. The maps are varied and some of them feature a high variation in height, adding to the hilarity (standing on a high ledge dropping firebombs on people's heads is always going to be a winner). Fire also plays a big part in the game: for example, while you're capturing a control point you can set fire to a few of the access points, ensuring you aren't bothered. For a game with 80 hours of play, a cracking map editor (see box out) and a fun multiplayer experience, *Far Cry 2* is certainly shaping up to be something exceptional.

So, a quick four-page update, then, on what is looking to be the next big thing in computer gaming. The great thing is that if you're reading this, it won't be too long until it's on a shelf near you. Once again, thanks to Ubisoft and Megarom - especially Clint, LP, Mike and Jenny - for making it all possible – we really had a blast. **NAG**

Michael James



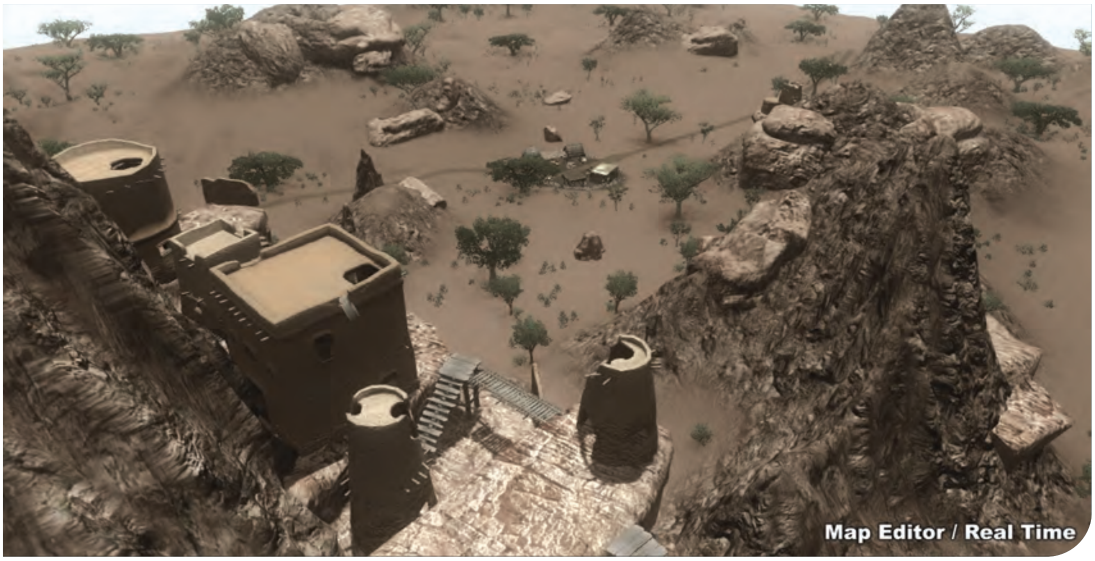
On the console version this is your budget in terms of memory, objects and performance. As you add complexity to the map these bars will fill up. The one performance bar moves from green to red – stay out of the red if you want your map to run smoothly.

As you edit the game is running in the background, allowing you to simply press a single button and jump straight into the map you're working on.

The brush tool can be sized, constrained and modified in a number of ways to ensure your creations look as natural as possible.

Clearly visible icons of spawn points, vehicles and other items make it easy to modify where everything goes.

A few of the many different types of textures and looks you can apply to the map.



MAP EDITOR

To be honest, map-making in *Far Cry 2* is about as easy as making a toasted cheese and tomato sandwich. You still have to get all the ingredients, cut up the tomato, butter the bread and wait for the oven to heat up, but it's definitely easier than roasting a chicken. Many games in the past have 'tried' to give gamers 'easy-to-use' map-making software (and when compared with early level editors for games such as *Quake III* they have succeeded). Map-making is relatively simple if you know how 3D environments work and know that you have to set a player start position; but for the rest of us, it's all overly-complicated and lacks the quick thrills that keep people coming back. We can confidently say that (after some basic training) a monkey can use the tools in *Far Cry 2* and end up with a respectable-looking result. Even if you don't read manuals, you can put together a professional-looking map (multiplayer only) with very little effort. Here's a brief rundown of some of the options. You begin with a 512m² blank 'kitchen tile'. On the Xbox 360, there's a bar at the top of the screen highlighting your memory, object and performance budgets (this controls how many objects and/or how complex your map is – dip into the red, and your map won't play well). Naturally, this will be slightly different for the PC version. From here, you can bring up an eight-object radial menu with terrain tools, objects, collection system, paint texture, environment settings, playable zone and road, and finally snapshot. Each of these either goes deeper or simply brings up a selection of sliders you can tweak. The terrain menu has the usual landscape raising- or lowering-buttons, and also a few smart tools like erosion and noise to make your odd, circular-looking mountain more believable. The brush you paint the landscape with can also be sized and constrained. Once you've done that, you can paint the ground texture with a number of textures stored under the following sub-menus: desert, savannah, woodland or jungle. Next, you go to the collection system where you can add environments such as jungles or savannah (again all controlled by the brush settings). If, for example, halfway through you decide to change from a jungle to a desert, it's as easy as selecting a new collection. From here, you can dig out a riverbed and raise the water level, add objects and vehicles, and you can even change the time of day and the weather conditions, and so forth. It's also important to mention that at any time you can press a button and be in the game, testing it (when you're editing your map, the game is actually running in the background). Once you've passed map validation, which requires you to have a minimum amount of spawn points and bases, you're ready to upload your creation to a community pool and see if anyone likes it. This is only a quick overview of everything that's up for grabs, and essentially just skims the surface. A fair comparison of the *Far Cry 2* map editor would be the various editors in *Spore*: simple to use while still offering depth to those who seek it (for the ultra lazy, there's a wilderness generator that does most of the work for you).

Developer→ Ascaron Entertainment | **Publisher→** Deep Silver | **Genre→** RPG | **Release Date→** October 2008 [PC] | November 2008 [PS3 | X360]

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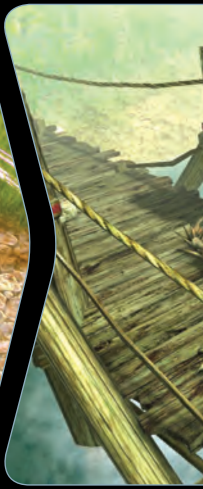
Let's be honest: this is the real reason why you'll end up buying Sacred 2



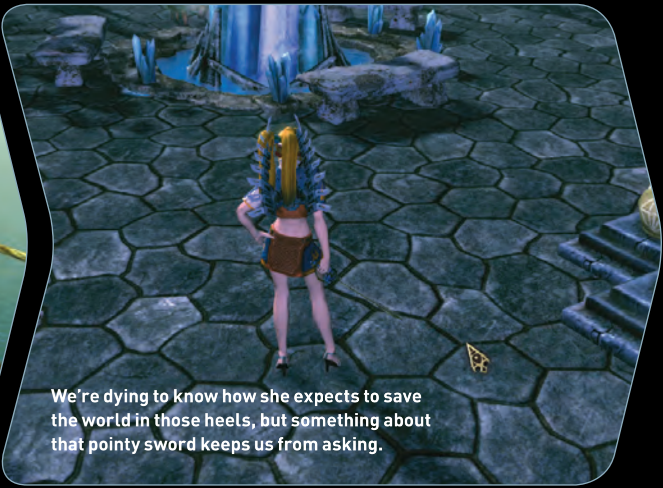
SACRED 2: FALLEN ANGEL

HANDS ON
TESTED

WHEN ASCARON ENTERTAINMENT FIRST introduced *Sacred*, it was met with a mixture of elation and scepticism. While many rejoiced at the arrival of a decent action-RPG in *Diablo II*'s mighty wake and applauded the game's unique and humorous approach to the genre, others nitpicked and squabbled over its numerous balance issues, show-stopping bugs and general lack of polish. Despite all its potential, the game got off to a rocky start and left a rather sour taste in the mouths of the almost two million gamers who purchased its variety of versions – each one progressively less buggy and loaded with extra content. Four long years later, and those dedicated followers of the history of Ancaria are finally getting ready to experience *Sacred* like it was meant to be – an epic, deep and extremely solid role-playing game. Not content to rest on the few laurels they managed to win with the original game's release, the developers have redesigned almost every game mechanic from the ground up, added tons of elements to keep even the most hardened RPG fans happy, and focused their efforts on delivering a classic fantasy RPG for the demanding, multiplayer-obsessed contemporary market.

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel takes place two millennia before that of the original, hurtling players deep into a power struggle between the races of ancient Ancaria over the control of the mystical T-Energy – a force that can just as easily create life as it can destroy it. Players must choose their allegiance in the battle for power. Will they save the world from the chaotic, mutating effects of wild T-Energy, or learn to harness it for their own evil purposes?

Customisability is the name of the game in *Sacred 2*. Each character has a total of 15 combat arts (spell-like abilities) divided among three aspects, over 50 skills ranging from weapon proficiencies like dual-weapon fighting to utility skills like blacksmithing, as well as the ability to customise six components of each combat art (such as 'area-of-effect' or other unique elements like adding chain-leaps to lightning attacks). Combat art combos (which can now be customised on the fly) are back in full force, and will let you string together a deadly barrage of attacks on the nearest pack of Kobolds with ease. This level of customisation, together with a vast character screen and a huge variety of weapons, armour



We're dying to know how she expects to save the world in those heels, but something about that pointy sword keeps us from asking.

PLENTY OF CHARACTER

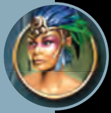
There are six playable character classes in the game. Most are completely new, while a few are redesigns of those available in the first *Sacred*.

Temple Guardian: An Anubis-inspired cybernetic warrior fuelled by T-Energy and uncovered by looters during a temple-raid, the Temple Guardian pleasantly follows its ancient programming and seeks to fulfil its destiny - whatever it may be.

Seraphim: Descended from the original angelic people who first controlled the T-Energy, the winged Seraphim must avenge her mistress's murder and stop the evil Inquisitors from fulfilling their nefarious plans.

High Elf: Fresh from the Academy of Magic, the young and naive High Elf seeks out adventure and excitement, but soon lands up in some tricky situations that are best dealt with by tossing a couple of fireballs about.

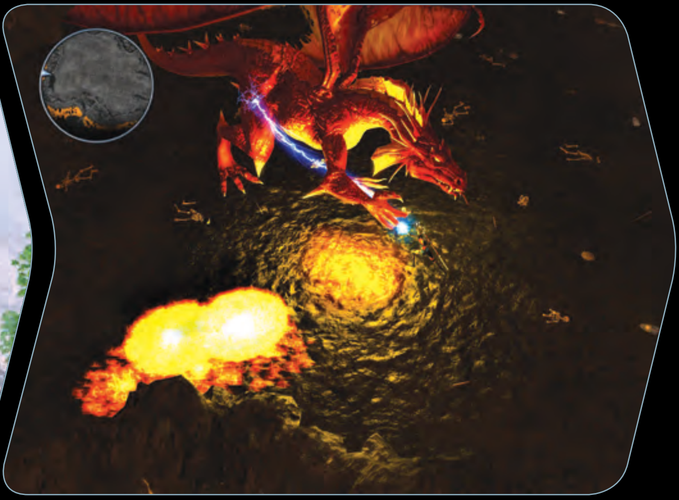
Dryad: This nature-loving ranger and spell-caster seeks to carve her own destiny. She must use all she has been taught by her slain mentor to uncover the heinous secrets of the world and restore balance to it, no matter the cost.



Inquisitor: Aka, "one of the bad guys," the Inquisitor must use spiky weapons and dark magic alike to serve his masters and his own evil needs to ensure that the powerful T-Energy is controlled by the only race that really knows what's best for the world.

Shadow Warrior: A once-powerful gladiator, the Shadow Warrior was awoken from his eternal rest and must seek a new life, once he's taken care of a few annoying necromancers with the biggest axe he can lay his zombie mitts on.

If you're reminded of Mako from Final Fantasy VII, have a cookie. T-Energy is a very similar concept.



and items, will ensure that two classes, identical at start up, could be completely different just ten levels down the line.

If you like sightseeing, not only will you be completely at home in the 57km^2, widely-diverse world of Ancaria that accommodates everything from dense, bunny-filled forests to mountain-top warfare, but you'll be able to see, fight or rain down fire upon it all from horseback. You won't be limited to horses either: each class will have access to a unique mount later in the game, with these awesome-looking beasts of heroic burden ranging from giant spiders to a gyroscopic hovering 'monowheel'. *Sacred 2* will support multiplayer. The game will support both LAN play and online gaming, allowing for co-op through either campaign or gruelling PvP in which up to 16 players can battle it out for dominance. Players will be able to drop in and out of single- and multiplayer games at any time, you could ask your buddies to pop in to help you clear a particularly tough boss and bugger off when they're done, or you could play through the entire game together, nipping off for a few solo excursions when your friends aren't online. Additionally, through Wi-Fi, players will be able to set up ad-hoc wireless LAN games in seconds without the need to fiddle around with any networking settings.

Sacred 2 is coming sooner than most thought, having been brought forward from its original "some time in 2009" release. The preview code we got our hands on is looking fantastic and, for the most part, plays like a dream. We just hope that Ascaron isn't going to make the same mistake twice by rushing this potential gem out the door before it's been sufficiently refined. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

CHOOSE YOUR DESTINY

Before you step into the world of Ancaria, players will need to choose not only their character class, but also the god they wish to receive divine powers from, their difficulty level (with a hardcore-mode toggle) and, most interestingly, their campaign. Choosing Light or Shadow, players can either battle the evil forces hell-bent on plunging Ancaria into T-Energy-twisted chaos or join them – two distinct branches that intertwine throughout the campaign, and will often see the player on different sides of the same quest depending on which allegiance they chose.

Developer→ Electronic Arts | **Publisher→** Electronic Arts | **Genre→** Life-simulation Game | **Release Date→** February 2009

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

THE SIMS 3

***THE SIMS* IS STILL** way up there in terms of popularity. With *The Sims 2* having spawned a number of expansions and attracted a multitude of fans across the globe, it is small wonder that Electronic Arts has decided to keep rolling with the property. When *The Sims 3* was announced a few months back, *Sims* fans got really excited.

One thing that has raised an eyebrow or two among the community is that Maxis - Will Wright's development team, responsible for the first two editions of *The Sims* - is not involved in the development of *The Sims 3*. This task has been shifted to an in-house Electronic Arts team. Then again, the concept has been solidified since the first *Sims* release, so things shouldn't be too different about the highly anticipated *Sims 3*.

The developers are claiming some pretty impressive capabilities within the game and, should they pull these off effectively, *The Sims 3* will become one of the most creative and empowering titles ever seen.

The first substantial change is a free-roaming, seamless neighbourhood. The obvious cutting down on loading times makes this a particularly special feature, but there are other, less obvious considerations that will help this game become more realistic and social. For example, a Sim wandering around the neighbourhood can go visit friends or other residents at their houses. Previously, socialisation only occurred at the player's house. The neighbourhood will feature extended areas, like a downtown, parks and other locations.

New Sim-creation tools will allow the player to create unique characters, using what the developers are claiming to be "unlimited" customisation options. Facial and body structures will be definable

LEGACY

Originally released in February 2000, *The Sims* quickly became a phenomenon. The original game spawned seven expansions that increased the scope of the game, as well as an online version (which turned into little more than a cybersex chat room).

The Sims 2 hit the shelves in 2004, and full expansions, an impressive eighteen expansion packs and several 'Stuff packs' have been released for the game, which added new concepts and dynamics to the game. In addition, two notebook-friendly versions of *The Sims* (*Castaway* and *Life Stories*) have also been released, as well as several console and mobile versions. If the Stuff packs and expansion packs trend is to be repeated, will we see another twenty-five expansion packs and several Stuff packs for *The Sims 3*? Only time will tell!

in ways that weren't available before, including physique, precise skin tones, exact hair colours and more.

To further enhance the individuality of each Sim, a wide array of personality traits will be available for each character. These traits, both positive and negative (including brave, artistic, loner, perfectionist, kleptomaniac, romantic, clumsy, and paranoid), can be combined to create unique personalities (i.e. complex individuals with more complex needs and desires).

The biggest change in terms of creativity comes in the guise of environmental customisation. Once again, the developers have mentioned the catchphrase "unlimited," which one cannot help but take with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, claims that the player will be able to customise "everything from floors to flowers, shirts to sofas, wallpaper to window shades" will make for some interesting gaming. So, naturally the following question (and some more) will arise: will a player who wants to design a sofa, for example, only be able to change the colours, or will they be able to chance the actual physical structure of the piece of furniture? While the latter would obviously be the best option, it might not be a viable option. However, if the EA-based developers take a page out of *Sims* creator Will Wright's book, they may be able to pull something like that off. Using a system similar to that introduced in Spore, *The Sims 3* will be able to make use of complex, player-designed items, rather than just customised presets. For now, though, it does appear that the latter is the case.

The game dynamic is getting an overhaul too (along with the sound, graphics and everything else). The main aspect of the game will still be career advancement, but new goals and challenges, based on the personality trait selected for the Sim, also come into play.

The visuals (what we've seen so far) of *The Sims 3* are also quite a step up. The characters will look more realistic than before, and will be capable of a much wider range of actions and expressions, carefully animated and applied.

There is little doubt that *The Sims 3* is an exciting development for fans of the series. One can only hope that the promises made so far will be kept, but game development is a complex thing. *The Sims 3*, on paper, is a rather ambitious project. Let's hope that the developers don't have to trim back on features to make sure that the game doesn't need a supercomputer to run effectively. That said, there is little that will stand in the way of *The Sims 3* becoming the runaway success that its predecessors were. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

Developer→ Liquid Entertainment | **Publisher→** Codemasters | **Genre→** RPG | **Release Date→** 2009

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

FOR THOSE OF YOU who have never heard the tale of Jason and the Argonauts, here's a brief explanation: the land of Iolcus is a blessed place, with Zeus himself watching over and bestowing his favour upon its inhabitants. Jason (the king of Iolcus and the game's main protagonist) is about to marry his long-time love, the beautiful Alceme. *Rise of the Argonauts* starts with a cut-scene showing Jason and Alceme exchanging their wedding vows, when suddenly the palace is besieged by a group of assassins who manage to sneak in and kill Jason's beloved. After fending off the attackers, Jason takes an oath to not only avenge the death of Alceme, but to find a way to bring her back from the dead. *Rise of the Argonauts* has players guiding Jason (along with the Argonauts, the companions who travel with the king of Iolcus on his quest) on his path to fulfil his oath. Naturally, the game is filled to the brim with Greek mythology and in an interesting move, this mythology has an effect on the gameplay as well as the story.

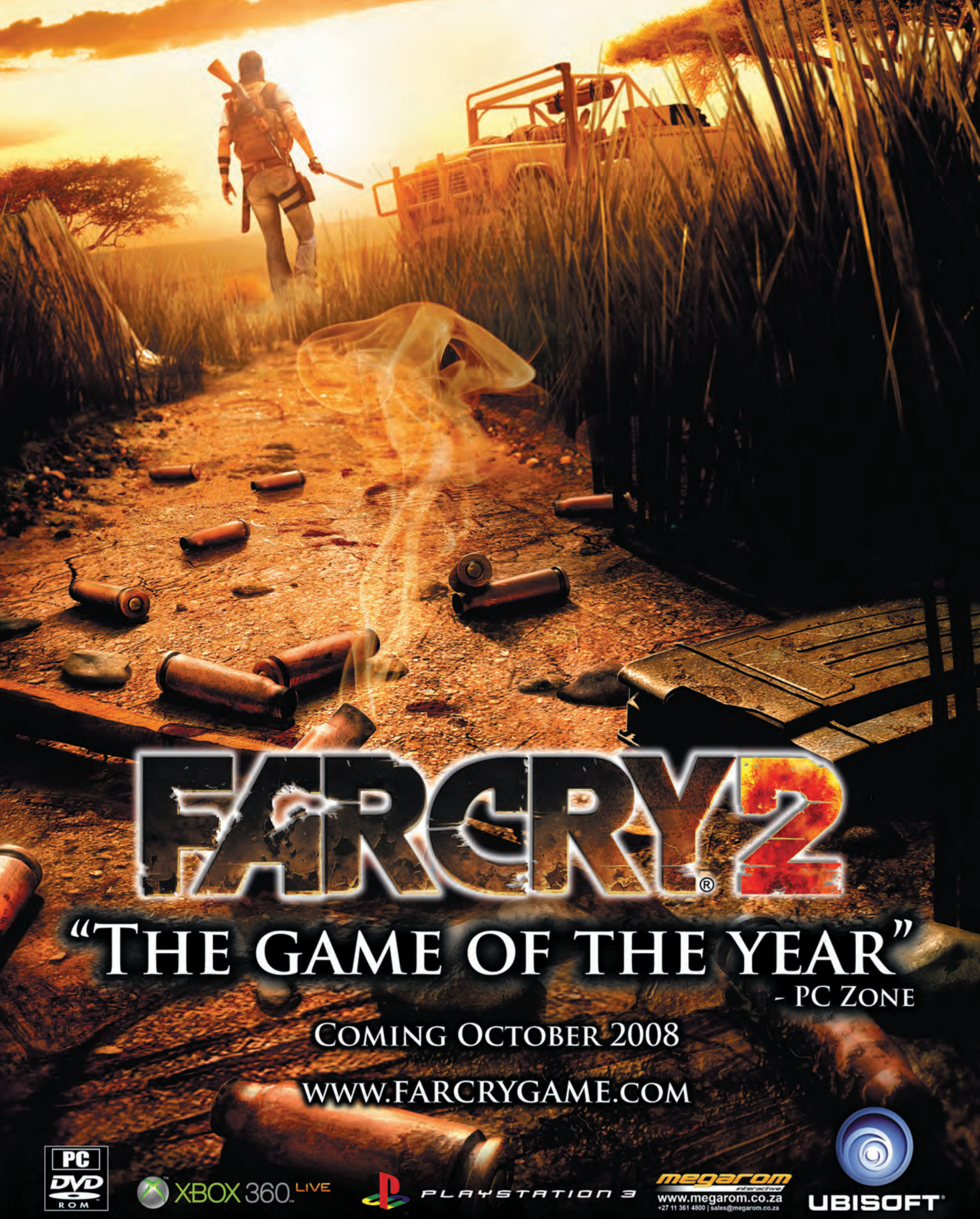
Let me explain. Most RPGs require the accruement of experience points in order to level up and gain new abilities. This is not the case in this title. Four Greek gods (Ares, Apollo, Hermes and Athena) grant Jason special abilities throughout the game. In order to obtain these special abilities, Jason must dedicate various deeds that he has accomplished to a deity of his choice, thereby gaining favour with that deity and allowing for the selection of a new skill from the chosen god's skill tree. An example of one of these deeds is "manslayer," which you obtain by killing a certain number of enemy soldiers. It seems as though any deed can be dedicated to any god, and it mainly depends on your personal preference as to which path you want to follow through the four skill trees.

Throughout the game, you will be accompanied by the "Argonauts," Jason's companions on his journey who will help during combat and give their thoughts on Jason's situation. Heroes such as Hercules (you all know who Hercules is, don't you?) and Pan (a talking satyr) can all be recruited to your cause. Three basic weapon types are available (spear, sword and mace) and you can switch between them on the fly. Combat is straightforward, but the simplicity of the combat system is actually a good thing, as battles are quick and often brutal (thanks to slow-motion bits that are activated when an enemy is downed in a stylish manner). 'God powers' can be assigned to the D-pad, allowing you to quickly access these powerful abilities that have been granted to you by the four gods mentioned earlier.

HANDS ON
TESTED

Rise of the Argonauts features some unique innovations that set it apart from other action RPGs. The preview copy we received was riddled with bugs and generally broken bits, but it was fun nonetheless. Once these bugs and broken code have been sorted out, *Rise of the Argonauts* will definitely be a title worthy of your attention once it's released. **NAG**

Dane Remendes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UBISOFT

Developer→ Volition | **Publisher→** THQ | **Genre→** FPS | **Release Date→** Q1 2009

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

RED FACTION: GUERRILLA

A FEW YEARS AGO, *RED* *Faction* was one of the first FPSs available for the PS2. This caused some controversy, as FPSs at that stage were seen as PC-exclusive titles. However, times have changed, and gamers have embraced FPSs on consoles (especially seventh-generation consoles).

Red Faction: Guerrilla is set fifty years after the original title, and places the player in the role of an insurgent fighter; a member of a newly established Red Faction fighting against the Earth Defense Force. The game's developers have promised high-level, destruction-based game dynamics, a massive open world and physics-based destruction.

The open-world approach the developers are implementing in the game means that players will be able to make many vital decisions about when to enter battle, how to launch an assault, and whom to attack. The combat is based on guerrilla tactics, which will see the player making use of modified vehicles and improvised weaponry; and the missions (which the player can undertake in any order) will be balanced by freeform destruction designed to destabilise the enemy.

A variety of approaches will be available to the player in these battles, supported by evolutionary and emergent elements. This means that the player will have an effect on the game, as well as being part of a changing environment. *Red Faction: Guerrilla* will be set on Mars, which forms the backdrop for what developers are claiming to be an epic-scale arena to do battle in.

A strategic approach will allow the player to use the destruction engine to their advantage, with permanent changes made to the environment through their actions. The environment can even be used to tactical advantage, with opportunities in that regard being limited to the player's imagination.

Naturally, a multiplayer component will also be available in *Red Faction: Guerrilla,* with a variety of formats, although the developers haven't mentioned how many players will be able to engage in such activities.

The *Red Faction* series has come a long way, and this latest instalment looks very promising indeed. The visuals certainly look impressive, although judging a game on screen shots is never a good idea. Still, if the developers manage to deliver on their promises, *Red Faction: Guerrilla* will be quite something. We'll have to wait until the first quarter of 2009 to see how good the game will be. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

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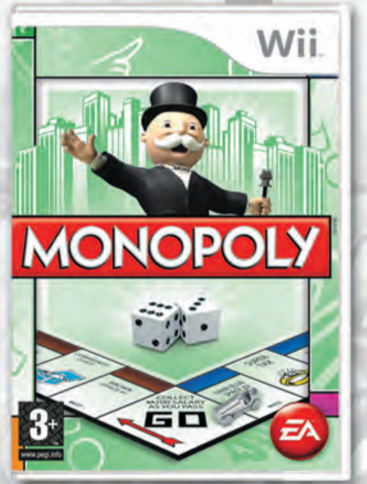

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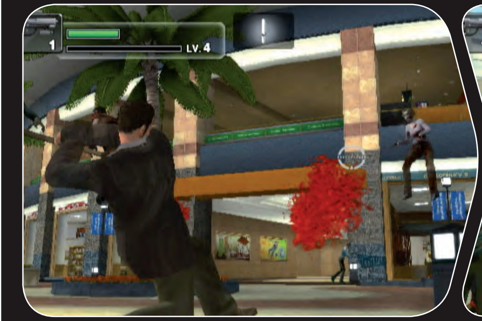

DEAD RISING: CHOP TILL YOU DROP

Developer→ Capcom | **Publisher→** Capcom | **Genre→** Survival Horror | **Release Date→** TBA

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

EVERYBODY LOVES ZOMBIES. WELL, to be more precise, everyone's favourite pastime is killing zombies. In *Dead Rising* (Xbox 360), you were trapped in a shopping mall jam-packed with zombies. Zombies were all over the place, and you had to fight for your life. *Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop* will be neither a spin-off nor a sequel to *Dead Rising*. Instead, it will be a direct port of the 360 version, obviously with a new motion-control system and scaled-down hardware requirements. Nevertheless, *Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop* remains faithful to the series' core concept: lots of zombies and plenty of ways to kill them.

According to reports on the Internet, the game's control system is very similar to that of *Resident Evil 4* on the Wii, which is not necessarily a bad thing, as *RE4* on the Wii is brilliant. Firearms play a much larger role in this version, as the Wii Remote is the perfect input device for a point-and-shoot play dynamic. The preferred way to use the in-game weapons is interesting: you need to inflict enough damage on enemies with your weapons, thus 'stunning' them, before moving in for the kill, using a mêlée weapon. Unfortunately, the number of mêlée weapons available has been significantly reduced, eliminating that exploratory instinct that kicked in while playing the first game, which had you scouring high and low to find new (and often very bizarre) mêlée weapons and therefore new ways to kill enemies.

The number of on-screen enemies has also been reduced, because of the Wii's less powerful hardware and to fit in with the ranged combat-centred game dynamic. While there will still be a reasonably high enemy count, don't expect the insane amount that you had to deal with in the 360 version. Thankfully, to compensate for the reduced number of enemies, Capcom has promised a few new enemy types that'll test your waggling skills in different ways.

The save system has been improved, and will allow players to save at the end of every 'case'. The game is also less dependent on the time-limit system used in *Dead Rising*. *Dead Rising* featured a 72-hour time limit, with numerous side quests that relied on you being in the right place at exactly the right time in order to activate them. This time around, the side quests are all part of the game's narrative, meaning you won't miss anything on your first play-through, unfortunately reducing the 'longevity' and replay value of the game. The protagonist (once again photojournalist Frank West) no longer has the ability to take photographs to earn PP points that were used in the 360 version to upgrade his abilities. A character-levelling system will apparently be present in *Chop Till You Drop*.

Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop will definitely appeal to gamers who never had the chance to play the original, or gamers who played the original and are looking for a new way to experience the game. Changes such as the reduced number of mêlée weapons and the removal of the camera system are likely to dampen the fun of exploration and experimentation that gave the original title so much of its undeniable charm. However, until its release, we'll have to wait before we can give you our expert opinion on whether or not this new version with its quirky features will be a hit or miss. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

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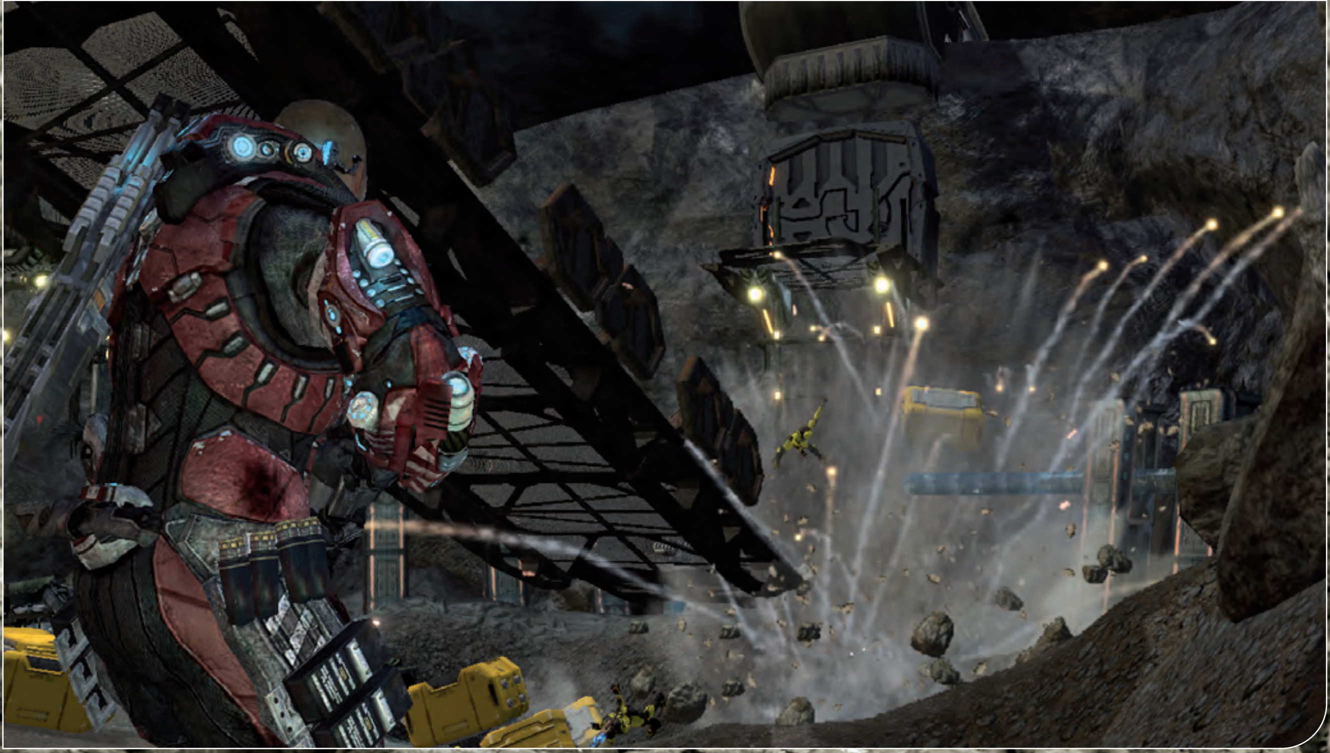

FRACTURE

Developer→ Day 1 Studios | Publisher→ LucasArts | Genre→ Action | Release Date→ October 2008

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

HANDS ON
TESTED

IT'S THE EARLY 2100S. Al Gore's fevered Jean d'Arc-style predictions of global warming and its cataclysmic consequences have borne true, and the Earth buckles and trembles under torrential flooding as its core slowly begins to boil. Over at the privately funded Embryonix institute in California, stem-cell research, cloning and other biotechnologies are tested and perfected despite UN censure, because there's not much else to do if you don't like swimming. But this new industry brings about a bitterly contested ideological schism, with some claiming it a blessing from above, and others decrying it, as so much naïve meddling with things is better left alone.

By 2161, the North American landmass has been redefined and subdivided by the encroaching oceans, and its inhabitants echo this structural dichotomy. The Eastern Seaboard, having allied themselves with Europe, have styled themselves as the Atlantic Alliance, firmly prohibiting all genetic modification among its people, and concentrating its own research efforts on super-duper cybernetic commando armour instead. The confederacy of Pacifica and their Pacific Rim allies, on the other hand, have no such petty qualms, so it's a mega-mutation free-for-all, with musculature augmentation implants and ultra-fashionable leotards. Predictably, the two sides don't really get along.

You're Jet Brody, an Atlantic Alliance Army demolitions specialist, and you've got a bunch of ER23 tectonic terrain deformation grenades strapped to your belt. Terrain deformation? Oh, yes. In *Fracture*, you'll quite literally change the landscape of gaming forever. Well, the landscape of a virtual San Francisco, Washington DC, and continental Southwest anyway.

In addition to the standard shooter load-out of shotguns, rocket launchers, sniper rifles and cluster bombs, Brody has been issued with a toolbox of state-of-the-art stuff for rearranging the planet in convenient, easy-to-use, man-sized bits. The Entrencher tool, for example, is designed to raise and lower terrain. Not only does this cause a lot of tears among the local mole neighbourhoods, but it's also pretty sweet for getting up or down to those places you can't otherwise reach, or popping up some formidable (it's an impenetrable wall of dirt and rocks and moles, you see) cover on the fly. It's also eerily reminiscent of the elevation tools in *The Sims 2* building suite, but we're not building a zombie pool house here, we're fighting a war.

Away from all its seismic gimmicks and gadgetry, *Fracture* plays more or less exactly like *Halo 3*, except that Jet Brody has a face, nobody is tea-bagging it, and the music sounds like you should be in *Star Wars*. The targeting feels a little imprecise, some of the character rigging and animation is a bit rubbish, and the game would be heaps better with a proper locking cover system[1], but it's looking like a reasonably competent 'shooter-with-frills' overall. Just don't expect the Earth to move[2].

Tarryn van der Byl

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[1] Because all games are heaps better with a proper locking cover system. I love you, *Gears of War*.

[2] I said it, I said it!

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POSTAL III

Developer→ Running With Scissors | **Publisher→** TBA | **Genre→** Third-person Shooter | **Release Date→** 2009

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

RUNNING WITH SCISSORS, AN American computer game developer based in Arizona, has a penchant for the risqué and obscene humour, poking fun at everything from terrorism to animal protection. When *Postal* first hit the scene in 1997, politicians and over-protective parents were outraged at the grotesque amount of violence in the game. Then, in 2003, RWS released *Postal²* with even more violence, crack-smoking hilarity and some of the most controversial moments in gaming history. It was crude yet brilliant, and a handful of add-ons and expansions later, finally has a sequel.

Following the depraved tale of The Postal Dude after the messy end to *Postal²*'s expansion, *Apocalypse Weekend*, Postal Dude finds himself in the gloriously mundane town of Catharsis, Arizona, ready to get on with his trailer-park life with a beer in hand and his trusty shovel at his side, but soon finds that unemployment is not without its flaws.

Since his ejection from the game-development industry in *Postal²*, Dude has been unemployed, and much of *Postal III* will be centred on the player finding and, most likely, loosing a number of menial jobs – you'll even be able to do the odd job on the whistle-blowing, baton-wielding side of the law for a change. However, what would a *Postal* game be without plenty of new weapons to play with? Aside from the usual M60, M16, gasoline and box-of-matches stuff, Postal Dude will also wield a ferocious, harnessed badger that eats faces, a defecating monkey and a classic baseball bat stuffed full of sharp nails, with more weapons to be revealed later.

Don't expect any miracles in the gameplay department: *Postal III* is shaping up to be a solid action shooter, but won't exactly redefine the way we experience gaming... which is completely fine, as long as we can still play cricket with detached (and flaming) body parts. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

FAT PRINCESS

Developer→ Titan Studios | **Publisher→** Sony Computer Entertainment | **Genre→** Action/Strategy | **Release Date→** TBA

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

THE PLAYSTATION NETWORK, LIKE Xbox LIVE Arcade and Nintendo's WiiWare, is a veritable playground for developers: it allows them to experiment with adventurous styles of gameplay, and combines the freedom of indie development with the exposure (and, if you get it right, profit) of mainstream publishing. *Fat Princess*, by fledgling developers Titan Studios, is a game that's all about maximising the liberal nature of small games development, but at the same time providing a rock-solid gameplay experience that's enjoyable, fast and hilarious.

Set in a medieval world filled with fluffy bunnies and strawberry fields, *Fat Princess* pits two teams against each other with the goal of rescuing their captured princess from the opposing team's castle. The twist: players can bring cake and other delicious treats to their captured princess to fatten her up; the larger she is, the more difficult she is to rescue. Fat princesses are heavy princesses, slowing down their valiant saviours and sometimes requiring multiple heroes to extract her royal buttocks.

Taking cues from FPSs and strategy games, *Fat Princess* features five distinct, hot-swappable classes to choose from, as well as collectable resources and castle defences that can be built, upgraded and reinforced. Play as a swashbuckling swordsman, a nimble archer, a fireball-flinging mage, a health-boosting priest or a builder, who can gather resources from the battlefield or pimp out your defences with anything from turrets to boiling oil. Up to 32 players will be able to battle it out on ten different maps, with the possibility of downloadable content coming later if the game proves to be a success.

While the premise of the game is already causing some controversy, the graphics look delightful and the gameplay mechanic backing it is a solid combination of many of the classics that make team-based games shine. We're not entirely sure how it'll pan out, but *Fat Princess* looks like it could be one of the PSN's must-have games of 2009. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

MIDNIGHT CLUB
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CALIFORNIA
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WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

To give you a more acurate idea of what we're playing at NAG, this month we've done a 'survey' of the staff and compiled a list of our games of the moment. No. 1 with a bullet is an old favourite: *Quake III Arena.*

Rank	Game	Score
1	Quake III Arena	21
2	Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock	11
3	Call of Duty 4	9
4	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 09	8
5	Spore	8
5	Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3	8
7	Geometry Wars 2	7
8	Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6
8	Pure	6
10	Grand Theft Auto IV	5
10	Chessmaster 9000	5
10	Warhammer Online	5
10	Magic: The Gathering	5
10	Command & Conquer 3: Kane's Wrath	5
10	The Witcher	5
10	Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee 2	5
10	Too Human	5
10	Battlefield: Bad Company	5
19	Heroes of Might & Magic V	4
19	Burnout Paradise	4
19	Bejeweled 2	4
19	Crysis: Warhead	4
19	Mega Man 9	4
19	Rock Band	4
19	Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe	4
26	scrabulous	3
26	Sacred 2: Fallen Angel	3
26	Sins of a Solar Empire	3
26	Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War (The Complete Collection)	3
26	Multiwinia	3

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

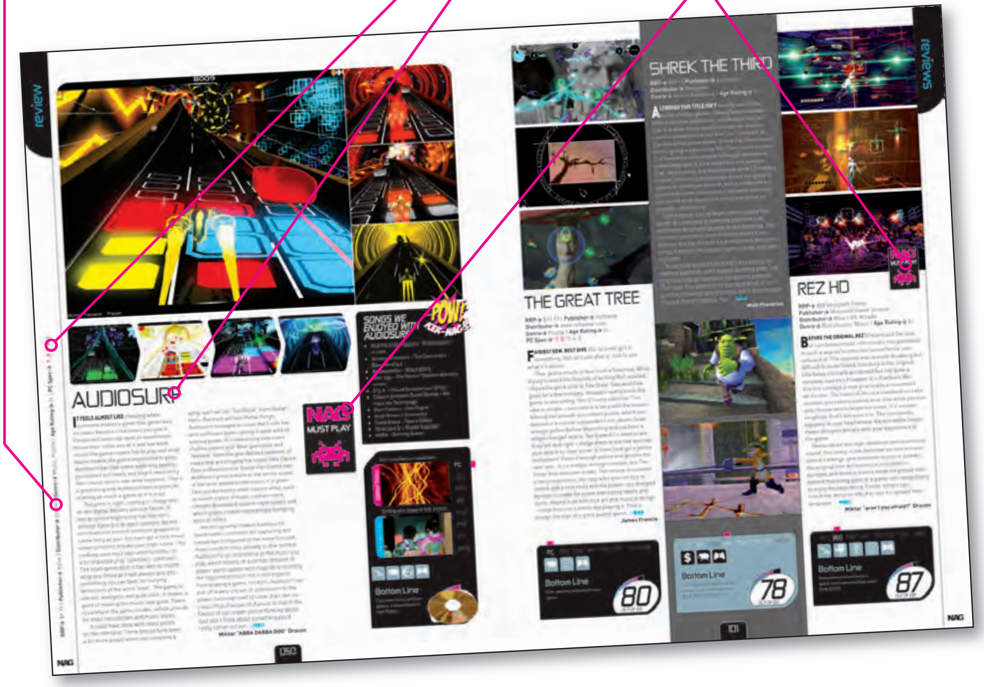
A quick guide to the *NAG* Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Where to get it, what it costs and who you need.

PC SPEC: Our rating for the hardware requirements of games is space age. Check the box on the other page.

GAME NAME: This end up. The bit you tell your friends. The bit you remember – with your brain!

AWARDS: Our awards mean something: it means we agreed on a game, which is rare, trust us.



THINK INSIDE THE BOX

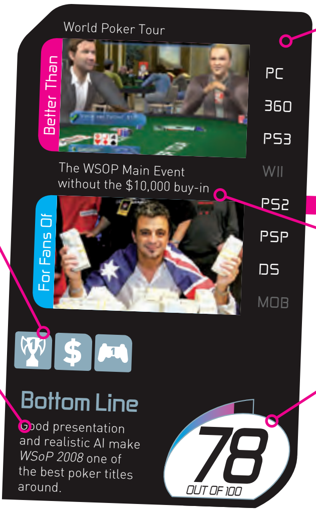
ICONS: It's just like a super-ultra mini-review: you just glance and learn!

PLATFORMS: Check it: new coloured-tabbed system showing which systems the game appears on and which one we reviewed it on.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, STUFF: We try to keep things in perspective using these two blocks.

BOTTOM LINE: Too many words, not enough pictures? Don't worry – we'll bottom-line it for ya.

SCORE: Sometimes it's a number (usually it is). Sometimes it's a picture, or something snarky. We like to mix things up a little.



World Poker Tour
Better Than
The WSOP Main Event without the $10,000 buy-in
For Fans Of
PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB
Bottom Line
Good presentation and realistic AI make *WSoP 2008* one of the best poker titles around.
78
OUT OF 100

WEB SCORES

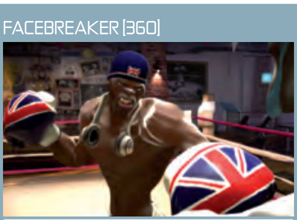
WARHAMMER ONLINE [PC]

NAG	90/100
METACRITIC	88/100
GAMERANKINGS	88.2/100

CRYSIS: WARHEAD [PC]

NAG	92/100
METACRITIC	85/100
GAMERANKINGS	84/100

FACEBREAKER [360]



NAG	78/100
METACRITIC	54/100
GAMERANKINGS	55.4/100

THE REVIEW ICONS

The *NAG* review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like.

ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.

BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.

BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'.

BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.

BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap.

BUTTON MASHER: Using only the power of your manly thumb, you can beat this game, Button Masher.

CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.

CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cut-scenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.

CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.

CO-OP: It is dangerous to go alone. Take this. A friend. Water with cooperation for Co-op Attack.

COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature; you think it should be mandatory.

FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? It's Foreign!

MULTIPLAYER: The maximum number of people who can play per copy of the game.

ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.

PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.

PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.

STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand like a friend.

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment.
[DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]

4 Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game.
[256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]

3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade.
[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]

2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit.
[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM]

1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games.
[Can run XP, will play game]

NAG AWARDS

EDITOR'S CHOICE: If a game boasts this award, it means everyone in the office agrees that the game rocks. Serials.

MUST PLAY: The thing about the Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.

NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE

NAG MUST PLAY

DISTRIBUTOR LIST

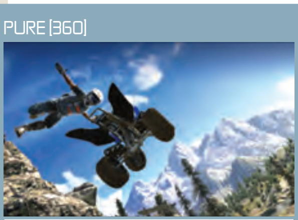
Aleet Distribution	[011] 888-8916	Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040	Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Asbis	[011] 848-7000	Megarom	[011] 361-4800
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450	Microsoft	[011] 265-3000
Axiz	[011] 237-7000	MiDigital	[011] 723-1800
Comstar	[011] 314-5812	MobileG	[021] 982-4606
Comztek	0860 600 557	Nology	[012] 657-1317
Core Group	[087] 940-3000	Nu Metro	[011] 280-0600
Corex	[011] 238-2315	Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640	Rectron	[011] 203-1000
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300	Sahara	[011] 542-1000
Esquire	0861 700 000	Samsung	0860 726 7864
Eurobyte	[011] 234-0142	Sapphire ATI	[044] 384-0225
Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300	Sonic Informed	[011] 314-5800
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038	Ster-Kinekor Games	[011] 445-7700
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700	Syntech	0861 274 244
Intel Corporation	[011] 806-4530	The Outer Limits	[011] 482-3771
Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817	TVR	[011] 807-1390

If your company isn't listed here, phone *NAG* on [011] 704-2679

SPORE [PC]

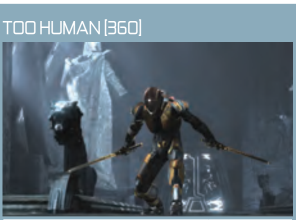
NAG	83/100
METACRITIC	85/100
GAMERANKINGS	86.2/100

PURE [360]



NAG	89/100
METACRITIC	85/100
GAMERANKINGS	85.5/100

TOO HUMAN [360]

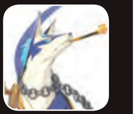


NAG	79/100
METACRITIC	66/100
GAMERANKINGS	69/100

THE REVIEWERS

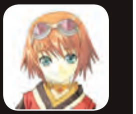
Seven kids (and a dog) leave their hometowns and epic backstory to venture forth into the magical overworld map of epicness so that they can save the fantasy universe from destruction, evil, badness and unskippable cutscenes – all in the name of love. Epic.

MIKTAR DRACON



Abandoned in the city as a young pup, Miktar was raised by humans and thus thinks he's able to eat with cutlery and dual-wield. To feed his addiction to Phoenix Down potions, he wandered the streets selling tail until finally his epic destiny caught up with him.

WALT PRETORIUS

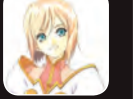


Downtown, where the hopheads flop in the snow, is where Walt catered to a million jerks who broke his heart. Down on Skid Row, all his life he was poor, asking Bahamut what he's for, until one day magic and mystery enveloped him with passion and power.

DANE REMENDES

Only half human and only half robot, Dane quickly became the saviour of his hometown after a tragic Blizzaga storm trapped the orphans. Fighting the elements, one punch at a time, Dane beat back the snowflakes and started his ascent to superstardom.

TARRYN VAN DER BYL

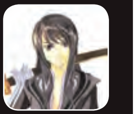


After she discovered she could heal simply by touching someone, Tarryn became the king (and queen) of Saturday Super Sermon where the sick, depraved and unlucky flock. Her tears cured cancer, her sweat abolished athlete's foot. Soon, destiny would make a housecall.

CHRIS BISTLINE

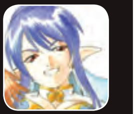
While his outward appearance is that of the calm, stately samurai ronin battlemaster, the stunning revelation of truth is that he's really the reincarnation of Neil Diamond, endlessly wandering the realm in search of truth, justice and America.

MICHAEL JAMES



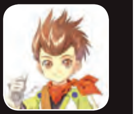
The fearless leader, the penultimate hero, the shining star on the horizon that leads to destiny, the Endless One, the Top Dog, the Revenge of the Doh, the Little Wonder, the One Who Will Save Us All From Oblivion... you get the idea. Destiny!

ADAM LIEBMAN

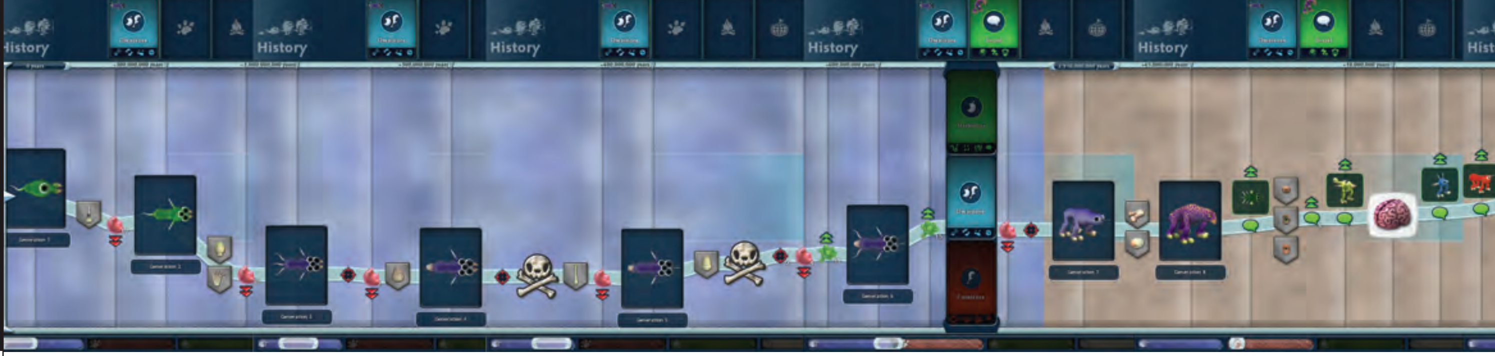


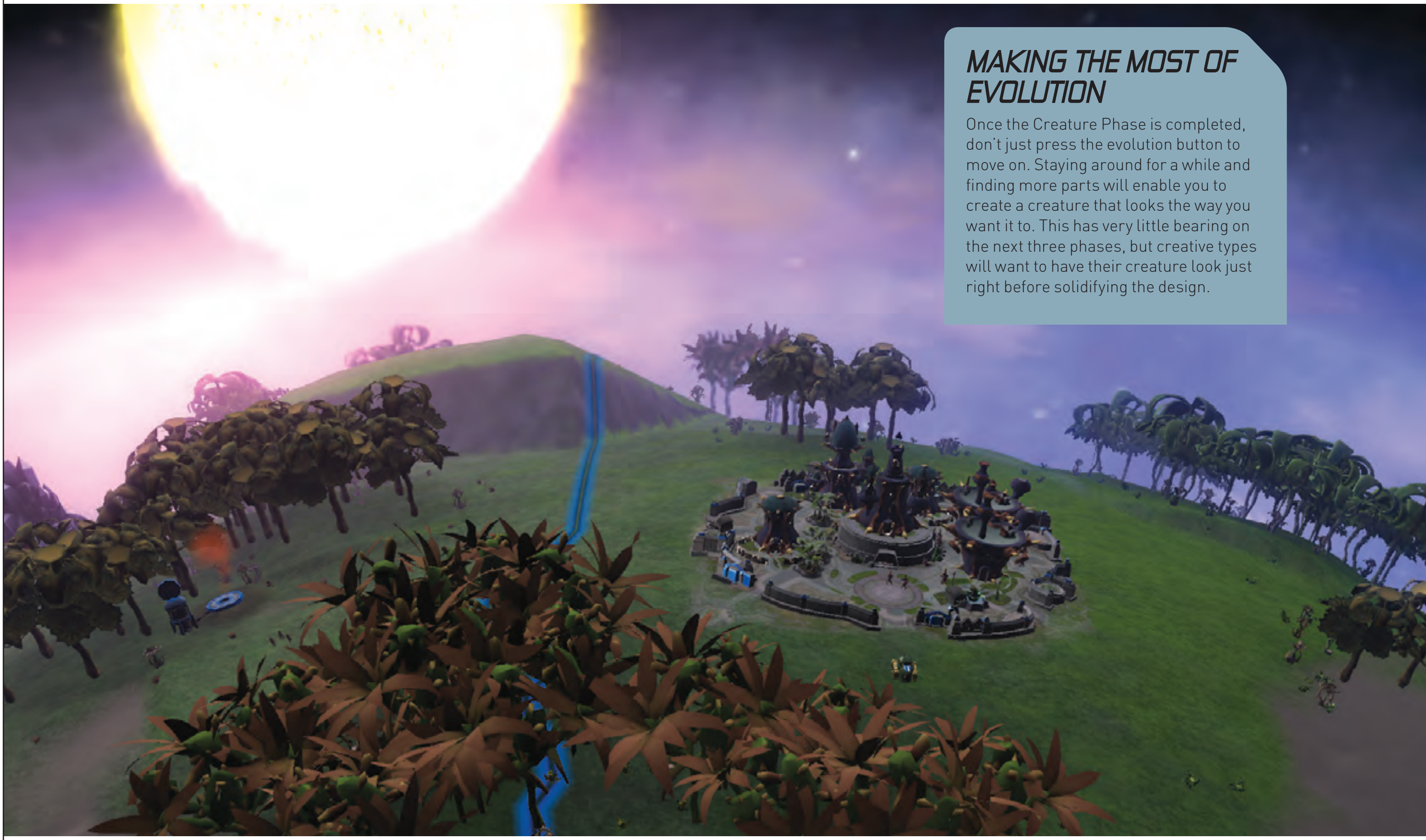
Token elfchick Adam arrived on the scene carrying a big sword, concealed hammer and enough Firaga scrolls to level a playground. She's considered armed, dangerous, busty and capable of snapping a man between her thighs.

GEOFF BURROWS



Because Geoff was added to the game so late into development, he doesn't get a voiceactor. Or a backstory. But you can tell he's that annoying kid that tags along with the main party because they don't have the heart to kill him.





MAKING THE MOST OF EVOLUTION

Once the Creature Phase is completed, don't just press the evolution button to move on. Staying around for a while and finding more parts will enable you to create a creature that looks the way you want it to. This has very little bearing on the next three phases, but creative types will want to have their creature look just right before solidifying the design.

SPORE

RRP→ R349 | **Publisher→** Electronic Arts | **Distributor→** Electronic Arts South Africa | **Genre→** God game | **Age Rating→** 12+ | **PC Spec→** 1 2 **3** 4 5

WILL WRIGHT'S *SPORE* IS possibly one of the most anticipated titles of the last decade, but the arrival of the game caused some grumbling from consumers. Most notably, the loudest noises came from gamers, or (more accurately) the hardcore gaming community. However, these noises show that they failed to see exactly where *Spore* has succeeded. The funny thing is that this vocal group is the same group who don't admit to playing, or plain don't play, Wright's last endeavour, *The Sims*. Makes you think, doesn't it?

However, back to the topic... *Spore* is a game about evolution. The premise is that a player guides a life form, from being a single-celled organism in a tidal pool right through to a mighty empire roaming the stars. It's ambitious, yes, and a very interesting idea. However, ambitious ideas often fall short. Whether *Spore* did that in its creator's eyes is a good question, but it did for many people who followed the hype. Then again, once bitten twice shy is a rule that should apply to any PC or videogame hype.

To be perfectly honest, I am in two minds about *Spore*. As a gamer, I would have liked to see a bit more. However, realistically, there is only so much that a game can do and, when all is said and done, *Spore*'s target market is not (contrary to popular belief) the gaming market. Rather, like *The Sims*, this is a game meant for people who don't traditionally play games. However, unlike *The Sims*, this is a game that introduces broad gaming concepts in a fun and entertaining way. It evolves the people playing it while they evolve their creatures. It, theoretically, will spark interest in a wider variety of games.

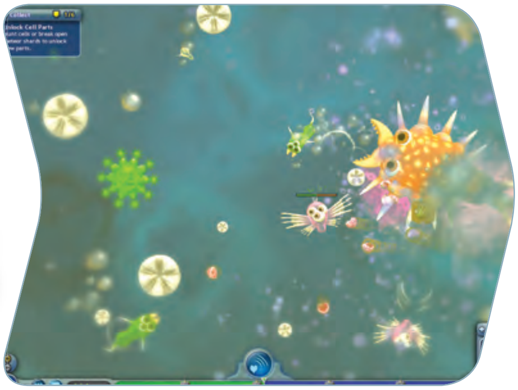
Spore consists of five phases, and the easiest way to review it is to take each phase and look at it separately. This is because the phases play and feel different to one another. Each follows the broad strokes of a genre, and is different from the others. The game starts with the player's chosen life form (at this point the choices are herbivore and carnivore) arriving on a fertile planet inside a meteor. The meteor breaks open, and the player finds his/her creature in a tide pool (this would be the Tide Pool Phase). The environment is rich and appealing, with an odd depth despite the phase's 2D nature. At this point, it's all about survival. The creature has to swim around and eat, growing and evolving. New parts can be found during this phase, but it's really just a 2D survival phase. It's quite fun, though, mainly because the creatures are so endearing. Even the sound is cute.

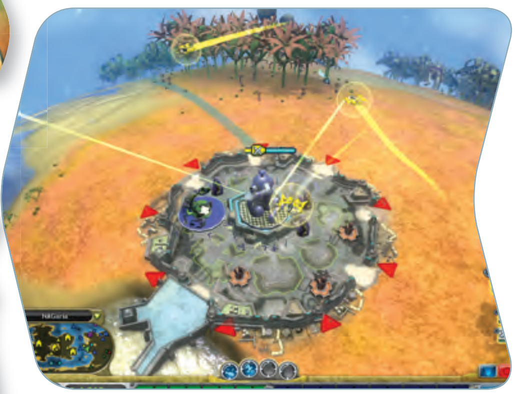
The Tide Pool Phase ends very quickly. In fact, all the phases end quite quickly, and people experienced in gaming will get through all of them in a matter of hours - with the exception of the Space Stage.

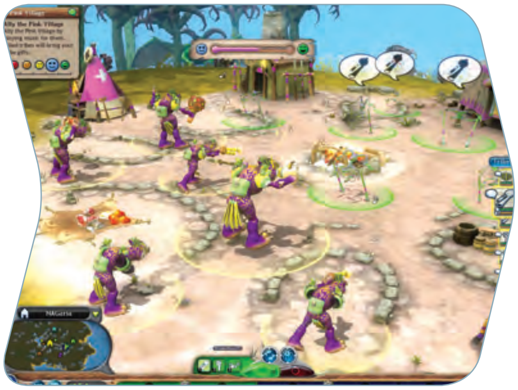
Once the player has evolved enough and achieved the few goals that the game presents them with, it is time for their creature to grow some legs and move out onto dry land. That's how the Creature Phase starts. At the beginning of this

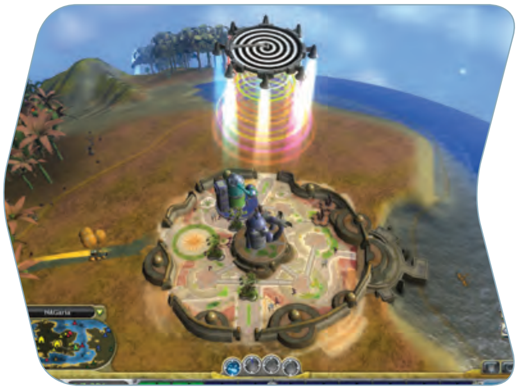
phase, the player's creature is either a herbivore, carnivore or omnivore. It is in this stage that the player determines the physical capabilities of their creature.

The Creature Phase features the Creature Creator that was released as a teaser for *Spore*, and involves the player running around in a 3D adventure type of set-up. The player will encounter other species, and he/she can decide whether to befriend them, or take them out. The player can also use this phase to gather parts to define the physical characteristics of their creature. Some parts are better than others, allowing the player to interact socially (or violently) better than other parts do. The player can also, as his/her creature develops, add new 'pack members' to his/her 'party'. These can be members of his species, or members of species he has befriended along the way. He has no control over them, but they do follow his creature and mimic its actions. When the player's creature eats, they all eat. When it fights,









THE OMNIVORE

Creating an omnivorous creature needs to be done in the Tide Pool Phase, and requires catching a specific little guy around halfway through. It's a green creature with a mosquito-like proboscis and five water jets providing propulsion. It moves hellishly fast, but catching one (or two, depending if you have unlocked the water jets before) will provide you with an omnivore mouth. To ensure an omnivorous creature (which has obvious advantages in the creature phase), change the creature's mouth to the proboscis as soon as possible, and switch diet immediately and entirely. This will result in an omnivore striding out of the water at the end of the Tide Pool Phase.

Kinda like

Being a god

For Fans of

Will Wright

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

It's Spore. It defies short descriptions like these.

83
OUT OF 100

THE EDITORS

The editors are very powerful in this game, and a number of them are available for use, both in the game and outside of it. Players can gleefully create new creatures, buildings and vehicles outside of the game, using them later if they choose to.

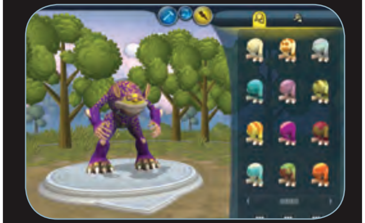
In the Tide Pool Phase, the player gets to edit their initial, simple life form.

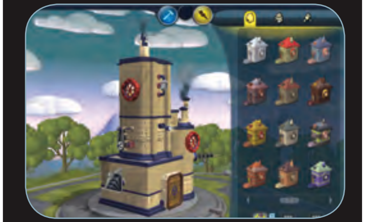
In the Creature Phase, the player can make changes to their specific species.

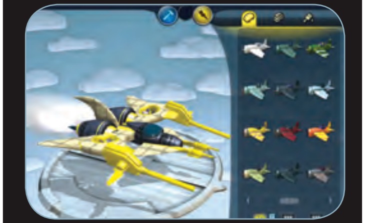
In the Civilization Phase, the player can create a town hall, house, factory and entertainment venue, as well as land, water and air vehicles for each of the three tactical categories (religious, military and trade).

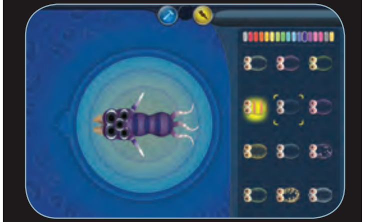
In the Space Phase, the player can create a space ship. Editing becomes a little more random after that. Engineering a planet is, in a way, editing its appearance, although the results aren't always exactly what the player is looking for.

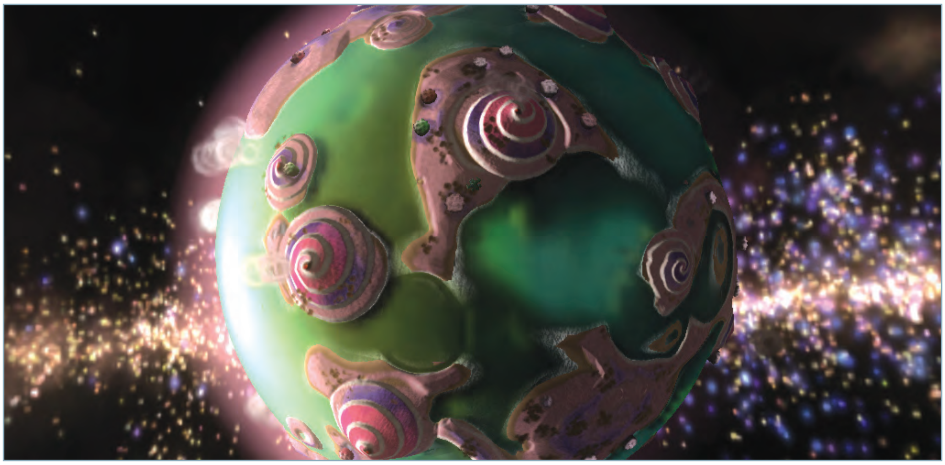
Additionally, during the Space Phase, the player can even edit the music of colonies, using a very simple yet effective built-in music editor.

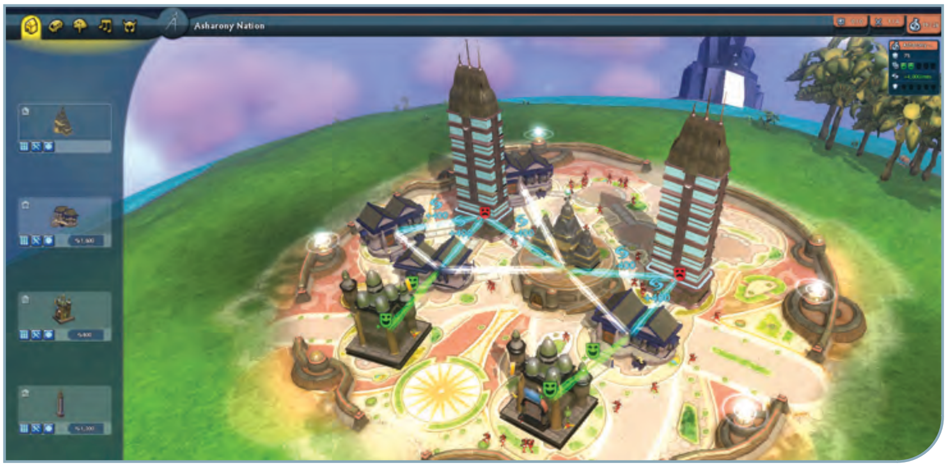












they all fight. The actions that the player takes during this phase determine his general approach in the next phase, as is the case with every phase of the game.

The Tribal Phase is up next, which takes the form of a low-level real-time strategy title. During this phase, the player no longer controls a single creature, and all evolutionary changes are final. At the end of the Creature Phase, the player is given one last chance to change the look of their creature, because from here on the only way it can be changed is through the addition of garments. Instead of focusing on one creature, the Tribal Phase shifts focus to a small village. The player needs to gather one resource (food), which is used to add new tribe members and add new buildings. The player will need to interact with other tribes (which are made up of other creature species) through, once again, social or violent means. While military conquest of another tribe is arguably easier, converting these other tribes by social means has more advantages - in the form of resource gifts. This part of the game isn't particularly deep, and the tactics needed (whether naughty or nice) basically come down to rushing.

Next up is the Civilization Phase. Once the player's creature has conquered all the other species and becomes the dominant life form on the planet, it is time to unite the globe under one banner. Performance in the Tribal Phase has quite a heavy impact on this part of the game, as it determines the nature of the player's initial city… but more about that later.

Where the Tribal Phase is almost devoid of editing content, the Civilization Phase is full of it. The player will need to design four different buildings and up to nine different vehicles in this phase. These editors are as capable as the Creature Creator is.

There are three ways in which the player can lead his civilisation to victory: religion, trade and, naturally, military conquest. A city can only offer one of these options, and the starting city that

the player has is capable of the one best suited to his performance in the Tribal Phase. Once other cities are conquered, the player has a choice to convert them to cities capable of either the tactics used to capture the city, or leave the city as it is. In this way, the player can make use of all three approaches.

The Civilization Phase is over very quickly, ending with the player designing a space ship to take his civilisation into the stars. The Space Phase takes up the lion's share of game time, and allows the player (after a few initial mandatory missions) to take on the galaxy in their own sweet time. The player can explore and trade, conquer and befriend, or perform a little planetary engineering for ages in this part of the game, growing their particular empire by taking over new star systems. This is by far the deepest and engrossing part of the game. It gets a bit boggy every now and then, but not overly so, and despite a defined end goal, the player is pretty much left up to his or her own devices.

As we said, *Spore* is a game consisting

COMPLAINTS DEPT.

There have been many complaints about *Spore* – most notably about the heavy DRM that comes with the game. At the time of writing, EA has made some concessions on that matter, upping the install limit from three to five, and enabling more than one online account per copy of the game.

Further complaints have come from other sectors, including (believe it or not) atheists who felt the use of religion in the game was offensive. Have to love that one.

One of the most responded-to complaints came in the form of a site called www.antispore.com, which was apparently created by a conservative Christian berating *Spore* for teaching evolution. Even when the site was revealed as being a hoax (in the form of a Rick Roller meme), the storm continued for a few days, proving that gamers react before reading.

SECOND OPINION

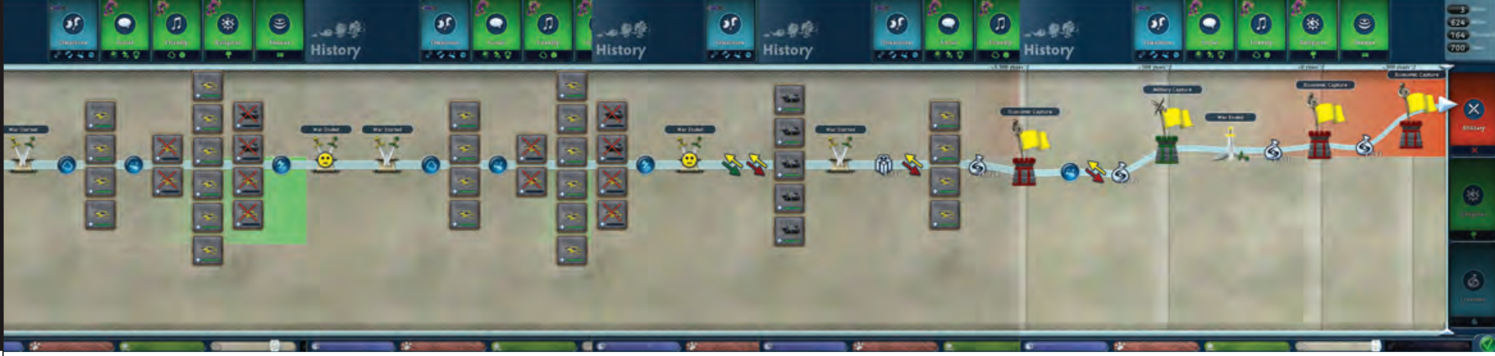
I'm going to get straight to the point and say that I am glad that I was never roped in by *Spore*'s hype, because if I had, the disappointment would have been crushing. My experience with it, however, was not bad right from the get-go.

Initially, I found it quite charming: the graphics in the 'cell stage' are detailed, and have a fantastic artistic direction, with heavy use of transparent effects, and trippy animations. The game style itself, at this point, is quite amusing, but part of this is from anticipation of more evolved game modes to come later.

And this is where *Spore* fails: it fails to evolve sufficiently. The creature stage is fine, but nothing spectacular. Here is where one gets to have fun with 'genetic modification'. After that, we enter the tribal stage, the civilisation stage and the space stage. Unfortunately, by now the game has largely stagnated – not only are the graphics more primitive than in the cell stage (despite being 3D as opposed to 2D), but, more importantly, the game mechanics become very repetitive. The space stage holds the most promise for greatness, but doesn't pull it off. It is too demanding for most causal players, yet too shallow for hardcore players (and lacking in proper management tools to leverage the play potential). There is much talk about hopes that an expansion pack might save this one, but a game should be able to stand on its own merits. As it stands now, it is mediocre at best.

Alex Jelagin

55
OUT OF 100



of five smaller games. None of these is particularly deep or complex, although the Space Phase does offer more than the other four... combined. This lack of depth is one of the reasons why games are a little disappointing. But *Spore* transcends the mere sum of its parts, and is actually a very entertaining and addictive experience.

The true genius of *Spore* doesn't stem from its game dynamic, but rather from two other aspects: the technology powering the game, and the community surrounding it. The technology used in the creators is great, purely because there are almost no restrictions (other than an understandable limitation on the number of parts a creation may have) and each creation translates seamlessly and correctly into the game universe. The community is what drives the amazing diversity of the game. Creations are automatically uploaded to a massive server, and are visible as in-game creatures to other player's around the world. *Spore* takes the idea of user-generated content to an entirely new level.

It would have been nice to see *Spore* do a bit more and have a little more depth. The evolution model isn't exactly realistic, and the initial four phases are far too short. However, overall it is a great game to play, particularly if you enjoy a lot of creative input from the user's side. In truth, *Spore* isn't a game as much as a collection of powerful tools connected by a 'playground'. It is a toy, and one that can provide many hours of entertainment. This is a game you will either love or loathe... but, most importantly, it is a sign of the direction in which games are going. The massive amounts of user input thus far, as well as the excellent reception the game has received from users around the world in terms of sales, go to show that Will Wright has achieved what he set out to do – he is helping the entire gaming industry evolve. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

THE TARGET MARKET

I decided to get my girlfriend to try her hand at *Spore*... in the name of science, of course. My theory that *Spore* is appealing to traditional non-gamers had to be proven somehow. She's not a gamer at all, and often fails to see the appeal of videogames. (Images of ducks and water should be used here...) She took to the game quickly, despite battling a little with the controls initially (not a gamer, remember) and has now camped herself in front of my computer for regular marathon *Spore* sessions.

Please help. I have created a monster (which is kind of what you do in *Spore*, ironically). I want my PC back...

SECOND OPINION

Considering that I've recently written butch-credible previews for butch-credible games like *Gears of War 2* and *Aliens: Colonial Marines*, I imagine it's probably safe for me to confess that when nobody's looking, I'm a hardcore *Sims* junkie. I once spent an entire afternoon drafting and constructing the perfect zombie dungeon in an otherwise unassuming middle-class home, and another two hours or so watching the wretched thing crying on the floor because he didn't have a toilet. It's so often the smallest things that delight, and this is where *Spore* really excels.

It's the only game in which I can create a race of creatures best described as, "bipedal rats with antlers and sharks' jaws" and "exceedingly volatile," park them in a sort of bleakly industrial Orwellian dystopia with cyberpunk trimmings, and give them tanks to play with. And by "play with" I mean, "mercilessly annihilate everything else on the entire planet because the Spice is mine." Intelligent design... it's a lifestyle choice – and if it's packing intercontinental ballistic missiles in a submarine, well, so much the better.

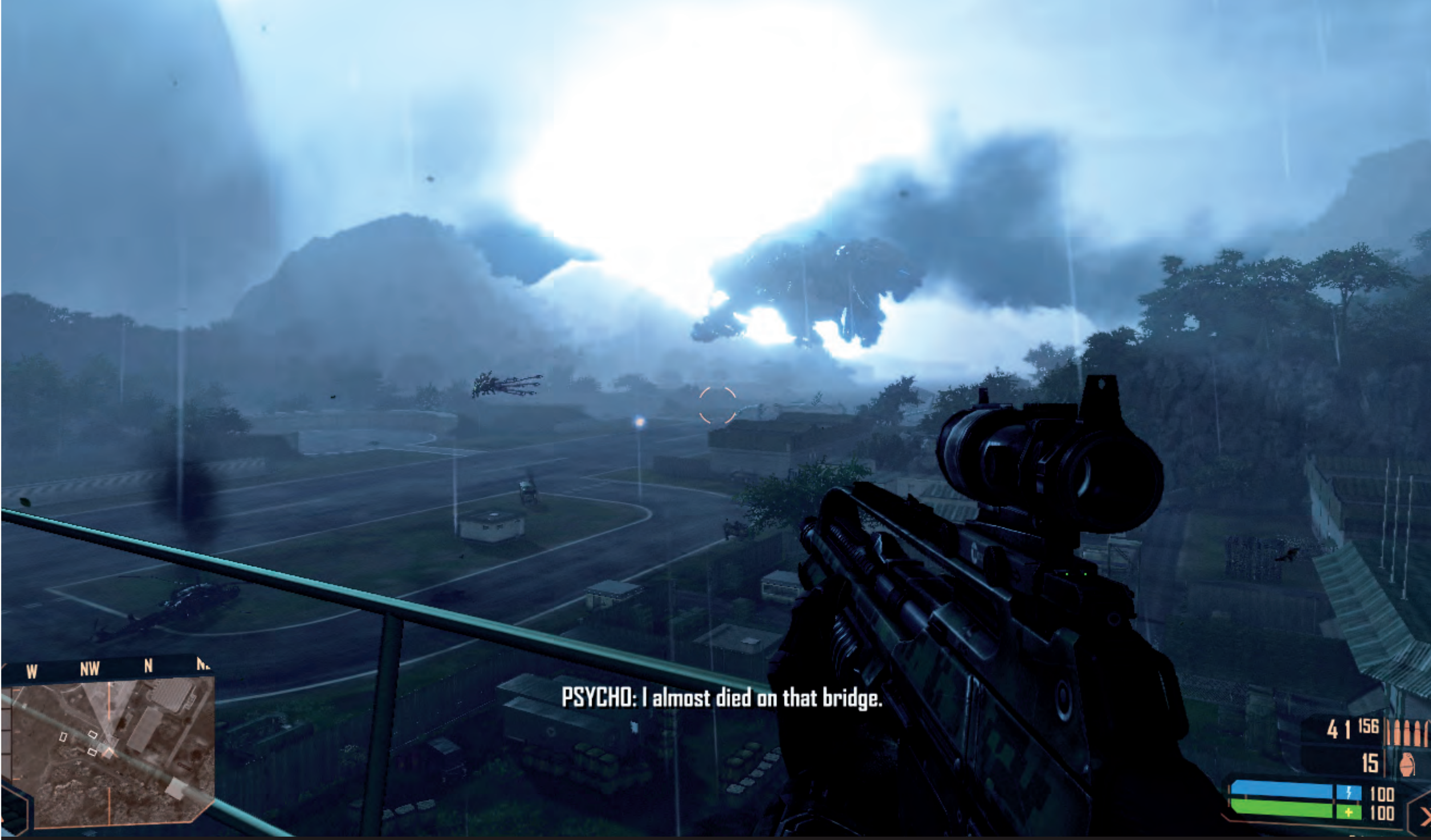
The tremendous scope of the game is really beyond the itty-bitty scope of this second opinion, so I'll leave that to someone else. But being informed on the *NAG* forum that one of my many races of scuttling chthonian nightmares had made its way to one reader's home planet via the Spore server and promptly devoured several of her tribe people, gloriously vindicated the game's R349 price tag for me.

Tarryn van der Byl

78
OUT OF 100

GUS FINK'S
BOOGILY HEADS
GUS FINK™
TM.
®
©

RRP→ R299 | **Publisher→** Electronic Arts | **Distributor→** Electronic Arts South Africa | **Genre→** FPS | **Age Rating→** 16+ | **PC Spec→** 1 2 3 **4 5**



CRYSIS WARHEAD

RUNNING PARALLEL (IT TAKES place during the same timeframe, but in another part of the island you visited in the first game) to the original *Crysis*, *Crysis Warhead* once again has you running around, dodging bullets and 'strength-jumping' onto rooftops - this time as Sergeant "Psycho" Sykes. You may remember him from the first game. He was the crazy British guy who liked to take more of a 'hands-on' approach than the original protagonist (who was simply known as "Nomad").

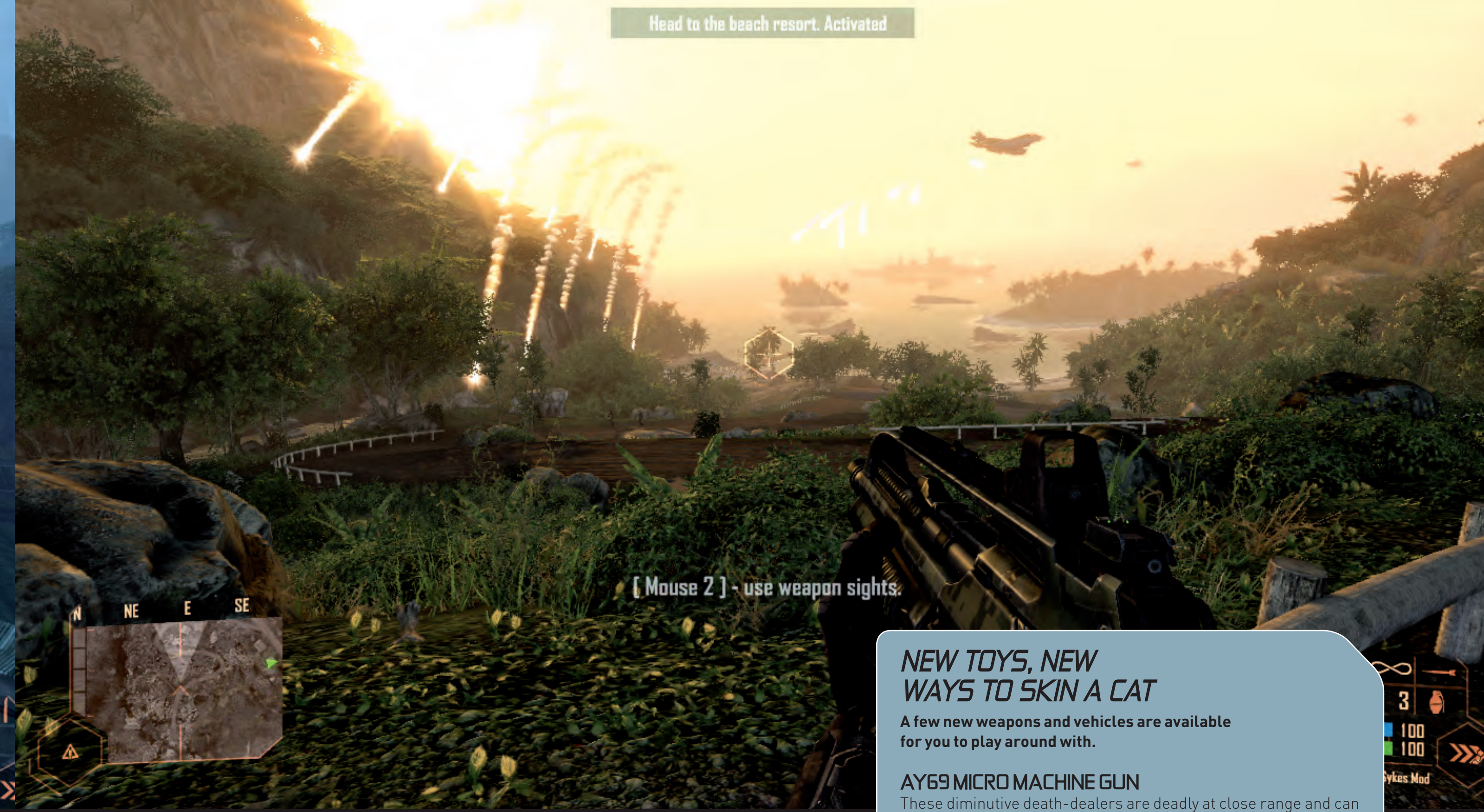
For those of you who have never played *Crysis* before, here's a brief explanation: it's an FPS in which the protagonist walks around wearing a nanosuit that effectively turns him into a superhuman. The nanosuit features four different modes that provide the ability to enhance strength, armour, or speed, with a fourth mode allowing you to cloak to hide from your enemies. In truth, the formula behind the series hasn't changed much in *Warhead*. The nanosuit still plays a major role, keeping you alive in even the bleakest situations. The sandbox nature of the game is intact, and you can still play the game the way you want to play it. If you're the sneaky, stab-the-bad-guys-in-the-back kind of player, you can still sneak around, your suit's cloak mode almost always on as you dispose of the bad guys quickly, quietly and efficiently. If you fancy your action to be more of the run-and-gun variety, *Warhead* offers plenty of nail-biting intensity and over-the-top moments that'll satisfy your action craving.

The game is far more action orientated this time around, with the downtime between conflicts having been cut down to the bare minimum. You don't have much time to catch your breath between skirmishes. Often you'll be fighting one group of enemies, trying to outmanoeuvre them, when you'll accidentally stumble into the middle of several more packs of enemies, adding to your list of "Times I bit off more than I could chew." The game is tough as nails on the harder difficulty settings, something which challenge-loving gamers will definitely appreciate. One of the main complaints about the original was the wintery levels featuring the aliens, mainly thanks to the dodgy AI leading the aliens on their quest to make you a red splotch on the snow-covered ground. Thankfully, the aliens have been given a boost in that area and they are now

NAG
MUST PLAY

MORE PLAYERS = MORE FUN

The multiplayer component of the game is called "Crysis Wars" and is on a separate disc (the other disc contains the single-player campaign). In addition to the original Power Struggle and Instant Action game modes, a new Team Instant Action mode is now available, allowing players to quickly join a team deathmatch and frag their buddies online. The Instant Action modes allow up to 32 players to run around the map, tossing grenades and firing bullets in the direction of the enemy.


Head to the beach resort. Activated
[Mouse 2] - use weapon sights.
N NE E SE
3
100
100
Sykes Mod

NEW TOYS, NEW WAYS TO SKIN A CAT

A few new weapons and vehicles are available for you to play around with.

AY69 MICRO MACHINE GUN

These diminutive death-dealers are deadly at close range and can be dual-wielded to double their effectiveness. They can be fitted with all the usual pistol accessories, and their high rate of fire means that you can pepper an enemy full of lead before they've even fired a shot.

FGL40 AUTOMATIC GRENADE LAUNCHER

More like mobile artillery than a grenade launcher, this beast can be devastating when used correctly. In addition to standard frag grenades, it can also be used to fire EMP rounds and grenades that need to be detonated remotely.

HOVERCRAFT

Able to travel over land and water, the hovercraft is quick and agile, but is not equipped with any weaponry, making it strictly for fast transport.

ASV ARMOURED SCOUT VEHICLE

Acting as an APC, this vehicle can be used to safely transport a number of soldiers across the battlefield. This vehicle is often armed with either a mounted machine gun or a mounted anti-armour weapon.

a far more entertaining (not to mention brutal) enemy to fight.

The story is, as can be expected given that this new title runs parallel to the first, identical to the original. The ultimate goal has changed, though, and this time around, you're in pursuit of Colonel Ji-Sung Lee and his container filled with top-secret goodies. Along the way, you'll get to experience the flash-freezing process that part of the island goes through as the aliens make their first appearance. You'll partake in a hovercraft chase through the icy wastelands that was previously the ocean, and you'll man machine guns on the roof of a train as it moves through the jungles and swamps of the island. This second instalment is a much more cinematic experience and you're often thrust into movie-style sequences that really allow you to toy around with the power of the nanosuit.

It's approximately one year after the release of the original, and *Warhead* is undoubtedly the best-looking game out there (thanks to the CryENGINE2). The game is absolutely stunning, and every inch of the world is incredibly detailed. If you have a decently specc'd PC, you'll be able to play *Warhead* at maximum detail. The musical score fits the game perfectly and sound effects are as they should be. The only real problem I had with the game is that it's far too short – even shorter than the first title. If you rush through the game, you could finish it within five hours (if you're playing on hard difficulty), but thankfully, the game has some replay value due to its sandbox nature. It's definitely worth playing through the game again on a higher difficulty level and changing your approach to be either stealthier or more action orientated (depending on your play style on your first play-through).

Overall, *Crysis Warhead* is generally more of the same. Fans of the original will love it and fans of the genre should definitely check it out. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

Worse Than

Having your own nanosuit

For Fans of

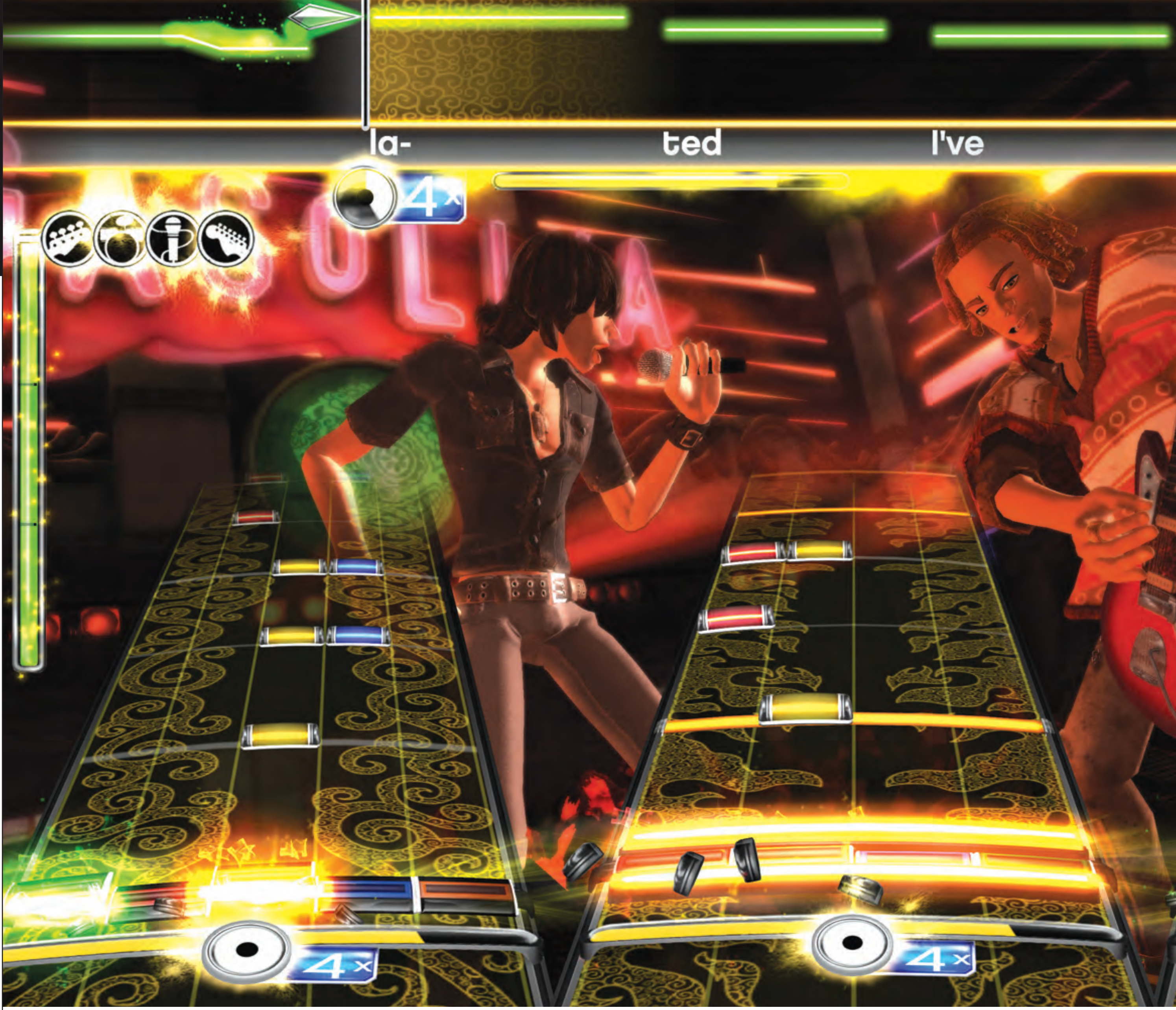
Crysis

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

More action, more good looks, more Crysis... A must for FPS fans. Just remember, he's British, you Muppets.

92
OUT OF 100



ROCK BAND 2

RRP→ TBA | **Publisher**→ Electronic Arts | **Distributor**→ TBA | **Genre**→ Music | **Age Rating**→ 12+

FOR RETURNING ROCKERS: *ROCK* *Band 2* has more songs (84 new tracks plus 20 additional free downloadable tracks); allows you to import your tracks from *Rock Band* (but there is a catch, see the box out); supports all your *Rock Band* DLC and even mixes them into the new World Tour mode; has a revamped World Tour mode; includes a drum trainer mode to help you become a better drummer; and now even allows you to have any combination of online/offline band members. Worth it? Totally.

If you're new to the *Rock Band* experience, the premise is a simple one: up to four players can form a virtual band, playing along to the included (or downloaded) songs as one of two guitarists, a drummer and a singer. You can play any of the roles alone if you feel like it, though there are benefits to playing multiplayer (if one person fails by not being accurate enough with their drumming, singing or fretting, another member can use their Overcharge to bring that player back into the game).

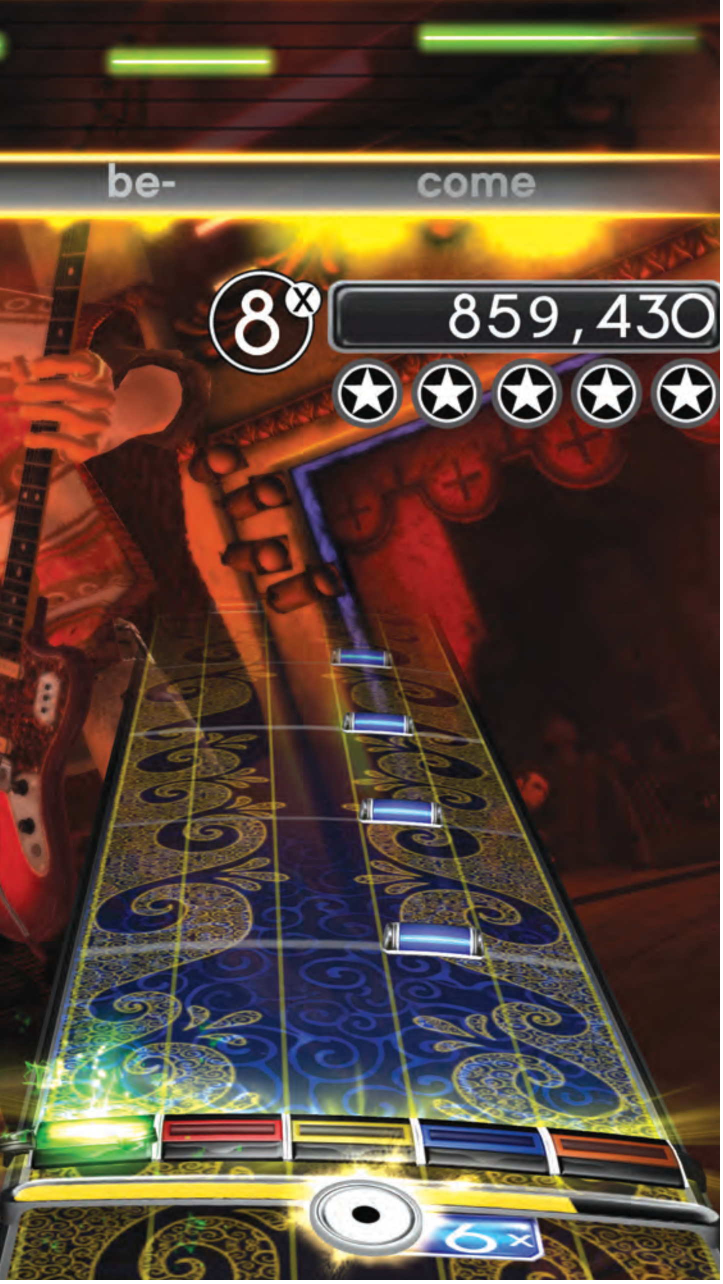
As far as rhythm games go, *Rock Band 2* is the absolute full Monty - there is really no comparable experience to having four players party up and jam along to possibly the widest selection of music found in a game to date. Even without purchasing additional tracks via DLC, *Rock Band 2* has something for every taste and ear when it comes to that which soothes the savage beast, although admittedly a few genres are underrepresented (techno, Afrikaans and yodelling).

If you're playing guitar, the game plays exactly like that other game - *Guitar Hero*. Notes scroll down the screen; colour coded to the fret buttons you need to be holding down when you strum as the note hits the line at the bottom of the screen. Drums work along the same way, requiring the player to hit the correct pad as the note reaches the bottom with only the added complexity of the foot pedal (represented as a line drawn across the field that also scrolls down). The vocalist will be playing *Sing Star*, for all

ROCK BAND TRACK IMPORT

You'll have to fork out 400 Microsoft Points to play your *Rock Band* tracks in *RB2*, and not all the tracks transfer (Harmonix couldn't get a transfer licence for certain songs, listed below). What the 400 MS Points are for is the Transfer Licence, which lets *RB2* import the *RB* tracks, transferring them to your HDD (and into the World Tour mode as well). The complete import sits at about 1.6GB, which gave us a good excuse to get the 120GB HDD for the 360, since if you're a big XBLA fan, your HDD will no doubt be as full as ours. The Transfer Licence includes all future iterations of Rock Band, so you won't have to pay this fee again. The tracks in *Rock Band 2* as well as all DLC tracks automatically have this licence, so you'll be able to play literally all your *RB*, *RB2* and DLC tracks in *Rock Band 3*.

Enter Sandman by Metallica, *Run to the Hills* by Iron Maiden, and *Paranoid* by Black Sabbath aren't transferrable in all versions of *Rock Band*, and *Monsoon* by Tokio Hotel is non-transferable in the European release of *Rock Band*.



NEW HARDWARE

The new Drum Kit for *RB2* includes two cymbals, which come included with the full Drum Kit or can be bought separately to attach to the standard *RB2* drum set. The cymbals cannot be used with the *RB* drum set, sadly. The new guitars for *RB2* include a built-in microphone that auto-calibrates the lag between the music and your playing, ensuring that everything is perfectly synced (perfect for those with LCDs that have a slight delay).

intents and purposes, with the added feature of having to tap the microphone during certain bits of the song.

The revamped World Tour mode is the primary method of play: you start a band, create and name your characters and then proceed to play at specific venues with select songs, unlocking new venues as you go along and gaining both cash and fans. Cash can be used to purchase new threads for your styling character, while fans represent how popular your band is. The more popular, the better the venues and the better the groupies you can hire.

Before each song, you can individually set your personal difficulty level (so even the most metal guitarist can jam along with a new player), and the new song difficulty display (yanked from the *Rock Band* online song store) shows you the individual difficulty for each instrument even before you start, letting you adjust your difficulty to compensate (great for those damn Police and Nine Inch Nails tracks where the drum track is just random notes trying to rape you).

They have fixed that horrible 'Band Leader' thing from *Rock Band*, where if you didn't have the leader to play with, you couldn't play with that specific band. Awesome!

The other modes of play are self-explanatory: Quick Play is quick while Band Challenge presents a host of pre-built courses to complete that scale up in difficulty as you unlock the next tier.

Practically everything that may have annoyed you about *Rock Band* has been fixed, upgraded or just plain removed in *Rock Band* 2, which really improves the overall experience by quite a bit. Of course, it's hard to deny that getting the entire experience is by no means cheap - *Rock Band* surely wins the award for 'Most Peripherals for a Game Ever' - but it sure is worth it. A custom track editor (proudly boasted about in the upcoming *Guitar Hero: World Tour*) would have been nice, but isn't much of a deal-breaker. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

Better Than

Rock Band

Practice For

Guitar Hero: World Tour

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Does what a sequel should do in every respect.

85
OUT OF 100

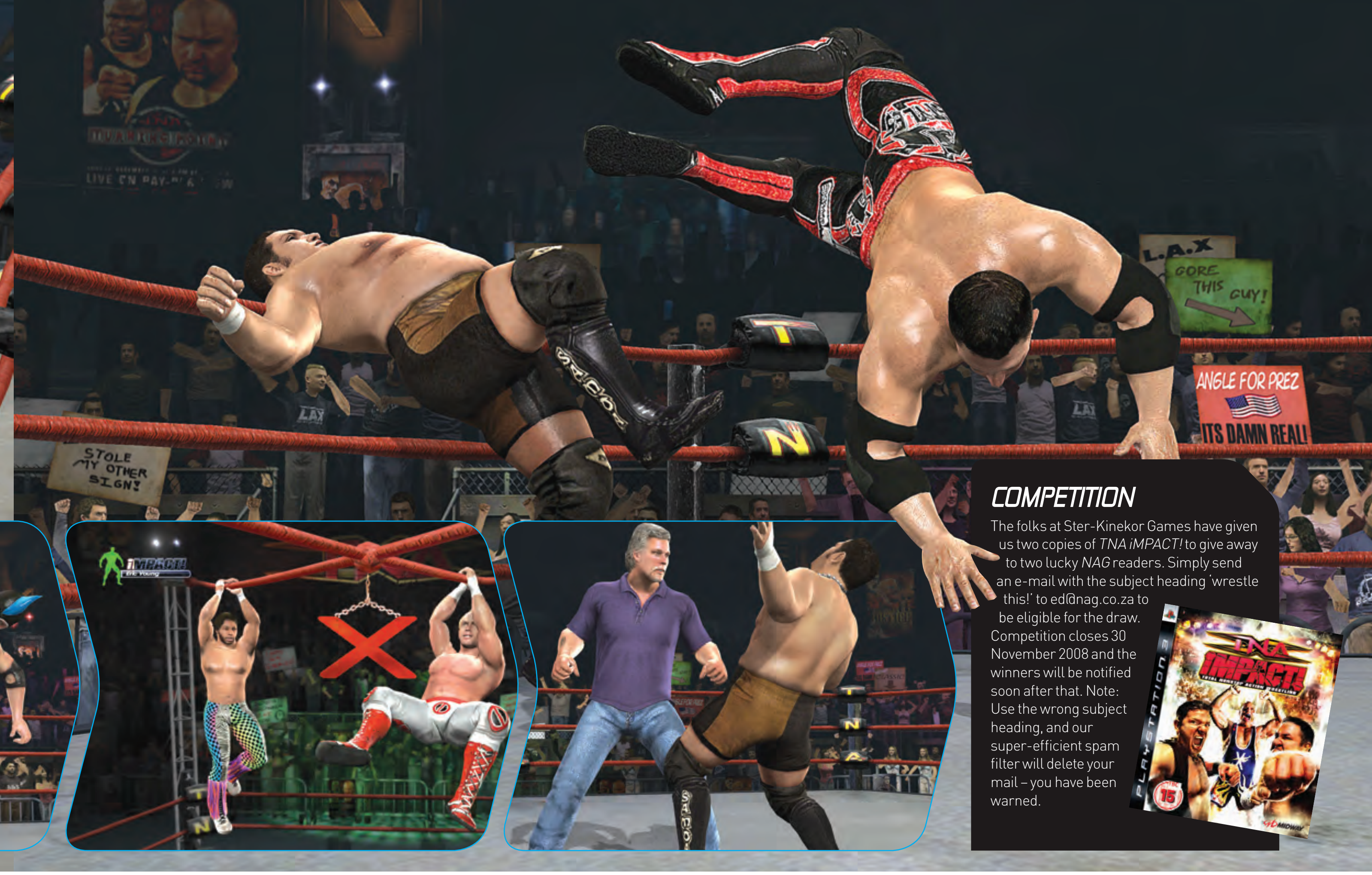
TNA IMPACT!

RRP→ R749 | **Publisher→** Midway | **Distributor→** Ster-Kinekor Games | **Genre→** Fighting | **Age Rating→** 16+

THQ'S WILDLY SUCCESSFUL *SMACKDOWN!* series of wrestling games hasn't faced any serious competition in a number of years. Midway, however, is seeking to challenge their dominance with *TNA iMPACT!*, based on the increasingly popular wrestling promotion founded in 2002 by Jeff Jarrett. Of course, this is quite a lofty ambition, given THQ's pedigree in the genre, but if this first iteration is anything to go by, Midway isn't off to too bad a start. Featuring a roster of 25 TNA wrestlers, including such well-known personalities as Sting, Kevin Nash, and Booker T among others, *iMPACT!* meets all the basic requirements for an entertaining wrestling game: it's fast paced, easy to pick up, and offers enough variety to keep players entertained, at least for a while. Unfortunately though, for all its successes, *TNA iMPACT!* is not without its shortcomings, and it's these few hiccups, glitches and niggles that prevent the game from reaching the heights of its opposition.

Being the first title in its series, *TNA iMPACT!* is focused quite squarely on trying to put in place the fundamental aspects of an enjoyable wrestling game, forsaking the bells and whistles that have become commonplace in the genre in favour of a sturdier game dynamic. This is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the variety of match types on offer – wrestling fans might be disappointed to note that *TNA iMPACT!* offers no more than nine different kinds of bouts, including rudimentary one-on-one and tag-team match-ups, as well as submission only matches, four-way contests, and falls count anywhere bouts. The only extravagant addition to this line-up is TNA's trademark Ultimate X bout, in which two or three wrestlers pummel each other to a pulp, with the ultimate aim of finding an opportunity to shimmy along one of four ropes that suspend a large prop 'X' above the ring, and to untie it to win the match. Unfortunately, the game's interpretation of this is somewhat lacking. Once you've made it all the way up to the large 'X', you need to time a button press to line up a moving cursor in the centre of its gauge. It doesn't have anything to do with how well you've fought your opponent, and it quickly becomes frustrating thanks to the fast moving target.

The other area in which the lack of variety in *TNA iMPACT!* becomes particularly apparent is in the wrestler's move-sets. Although the line-up features a number of different characters with vastly different styles, in the game they're all classed as being either brawlers, high-flyers or grapplers, with each of the characters in any given class feeling quite similar to each other. With the obvious exclusion of their finishing moves, most characters have a number of their moves in common with other characters, without so much as even a slight variation in the animations, lending the game a tedious,



COMPETITION

The folks at Ster-Kinekor Games have given us two copies of *TNA iMPACT!* to give away to two lucky *NAG* readers. Simply send an e-mail with the subject heading 'wrestle this!' to ed@nag.co.za to be eligible for the draw. Competition closes 30 November 2008 and the winners will be notified soon after that. Note: Use the wrong subject heading, and our super-efficient spam filter will delete your mail – you have been warned.

almost-generic feel at times.

More disappointing than that, however, is that the dearth of variety in moves extends also to created characters. In fact, initially you won't have access to anything but a fixed set of default moves, with no opportunity to really customise your creation's attacks until you've earned 'style points' from wrestling in the Career or Exhibition modes. The style points concept is a novel one, introducing an incentive to perform riskier but flashier techniques in order to earn more points that can then be used to unlock additional content. It's actually a very good idea, but it's just a shame that the already lacklustre character creator (which only allows the player five slots in which to save created wrestlers) doesn't offer a little more variety in the way of moves from the get go.

Where *TNA iMPACT!* does succeed, however, is in the actual play mechanic. The control system is intuitive and easy to grasp, utilising the PS3 controller's face buttons for strikes, grapples and pins, whilst the shoulder buttons are used for reversals and strengthening your basic attacks. It's a simple enough system, but it also provides a great enough degree of control over the characters, and simple on-screen pop-ups aid in timing the correct button presses to apply submission holds, or to reverse attacks.

The well thought-out controls are, however, occasionally failed by technical glitches; the game has more than its fair share of clipping problems and collision detection issues that can make it frustratingly difficult to hit your opponents in some cases, particularly if you're trying to strike them just as they're getting up off the mat. It's these few rough edges that leaves one with the feeling that *TNA iMPACT!* has not quite managed to live up to all its potential, in spite of its undeniably solid mechanics.

The game offers some very well-detailed arenas, and life-like character models, whilst always maintaining a smooth frame rate, even when there's a lot of action off screen. There are, unfortunately, some clipping issues, where pieces of limbs will end up protruding through parts of the ring and so on, but bar for that, the visuals are certainly up to scratch. The audio isn't altogether too bad, with the sound effects that accompany the various moves doing well to convey a real sense of damage. The voice acting is also mostly up to standard, though the commentary is typically bland, generic and quickly repetitive.

All told, Midway's first foray into this trick genre is a fairly decent attempt. It's a no-frills attached, back-to-basics approach that doesn't do much to redefine the genre, but it makes for an enjoyable and refreshing alternative to the perennial instalments of SmackDown! that gamers are accustomed to. *TNA iMPACT!* would undoubtedly have benefitted from a little more variety, particularly in terms of the available match types and move-sets, but it offers enough diversity to get by. The real shame is the few minor technical flaws that detract from what is otherwise an enjoyable and novel take on a formerly monopolist genre. Nonetheless, it's a promising starting point for what will hopefully become a very accomplished series of wrestling games. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Better Than

Mud wrestling with Barry Ronge

Worse Than

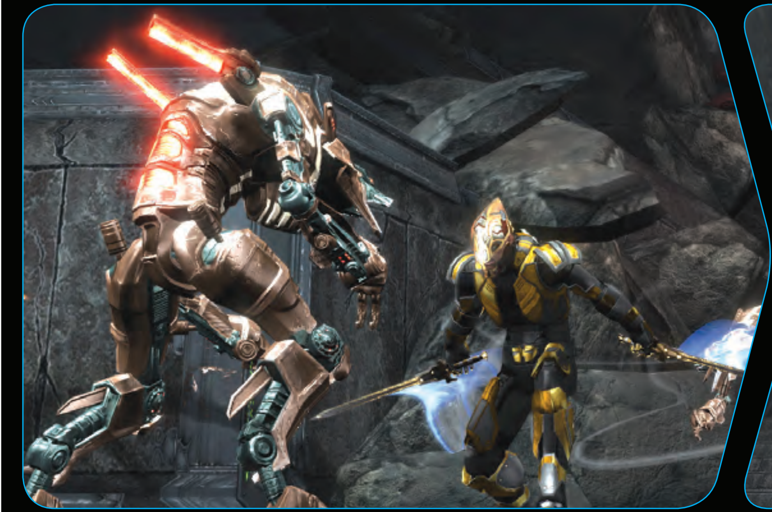
Mud wrestling with Kerry McGregor

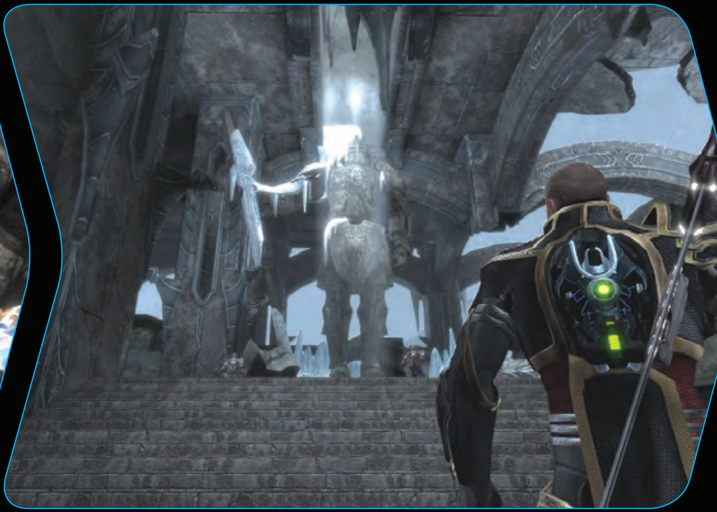
PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A reasonably entertaining first attempt at a different kind of wrestling game - sadly marred by a few technical flaws.

64
OUT OF 100





RRP→ R699 | **Publisher→** Microsoft Game Studios | **Distributor→** MiDigital | **Genre→** Action | **Age Rating→** 12+

TOO HUMAN

ANNARR SONR ÓÐINS ER *Baldr inn góði, ok er frá honum gott at segja. Hann er beztr, ok hann lofa allir. Hann er svá fagr álitum ok svá bjartr at lýsir af honum...* [1]

Not only does the preceding paragraph introduce our protagonist with the sonorous drone of indisputable academic authority, but it also conveniently demonstrates *Too Human*'s very own undoing – it's totally lost on almost everyone. And unless someone over at *NAG* HQ is hiding a rumpled set of the *Prose Edda* and a leather-wrapped drinking horn that smells faintly of last night's mead, I'm probably the only person in the review squad who was ever really going to get what this game is all about. It's important to get that out of the way right at the start of this review, because it gives a crucial perspective about my own experience of the game. I'm a huge fan of Norse mythology, you see. Such a huge fan, in fact, that I can read and understand the otherwise unfathomable foreign stuff[1] at the top of this page, even though it's written in a thousand-year-old Scandinavian dialect [***you've taken weird to a new level, Ed***]. And such a huge fan and nerd, that I actually know what's going on in *Too Human*.

Hel, ruler of bleak Helheim, recreational death fetishist, and favourite child of Loki[2] has been overwhelmed by a great rage and declared war on the Aesir of Asgard. Despite being painted the perverse villain, Hel has reason enough to do so, and it is the Aesirs' own lies and treachery that bring ruin upon their heads. Meanwhile, her daddy, imprisoned by the Aesir for crimes of his own, contrives a daring escape from his tortured incarceration, prompting the long-foretold doom of Ragnarök. It now falls to Baldur of the Aesir to stand against the encroaching twilight, and champion the cause of man and god alike in the face of dreadful rebellion. Thank Odin for hand grenades.

What follows is a story-driven, RPG-styled, brawler-enhanced dungeon crawler somewhere in between *Mass Effect*, *God of War*, and *Diablo*, only with an exceedingly annoying 20-second death animation with a Valkyrie that gets old after the first time and can't be skipped past, no manual camera control, and some target-locking issues. In spite of these faults, however, the gameplay is engaging enough, and the game features some of the most extraordinary and magnificent level design in any game ever. While most games of this type play out in a series of claustrophobic passages and halls, *Too Human* sprawls out across vast terrain dominated by the factories, pistons, and groaning mechanisms of some great and inscrutable industry. In particular, Helheim is genuinely terrifying in its immense scale and the darkly brooding malevolence behind its rusted facades.

Set against an ingeniously reinvented Norse mythology, *Too Human*'s competent gameplay and breathtaking scope more than compensate for its comparatively inconsequential failings. Given its poor critical reception at launch, I'd initially awaited the arrival of my review copy with enormous trepidation; but 26 hours later, I was halfway through a second play-through. If you're one of those reasonable people (like me) who don't expect a hack-and-slash game to change your life in some profoundly

---

[1] For those doomed to inglorious eternity in Helheim for their shameless ignorance, "Odin's second son is Bald(u)r, and only good things may be said of him. He's the greatest (of the gods) and all love him. He is so beautiful and so bright that light shines from him." These lines introduce Baldur in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* (penned around 1220), the definitive resource for all things Viking.

[2] After several disastrous tries, he finally managed to have a normal kid. Her big brothers are a gargantuan snake and an apocalyptic wolf. High school was a nightmare.

TOO COMPLICATED?

Despite its total conversion to a technologically sophisticated setting, *Too Human* pulls much of its narrative content from traditional Norse mythology. Despite their best intentions, however, Silicon Knights have presented the story in a way that is exceedingly difficult for the player to follow without substantial acquaintance with the original mythology. Here's a simple explanation of the events, with a bucket of spoilers slopped all over it: Loki tricks blind Hod into murdering Baldur. Robbed of his chances of heroic death in battle and an eternity guzzling boar fillets in Valhalla, Baldur is shipped off Helheim. His wife, Nyanna, kills herself. With the obvious exception of Loki (who has since been apprehended and locked up), the gods decide they miss Baldur too much, and send Hermod off to bring him back to Asgard, violating a long-standing agreement of non-interference between Hel and Odin and precipitating war between the realms. Nobody bothers to tell Baldur what really happened, instead fobbing off some deliberately vague story about Hod being somehow responsible for Nyanna's death. Baldur storms off and exacts bloody vengeance upon Hod. Loki escapes, and begins to marshal his forces against the Aesir, while Hel parades her legions of reanimated corpses around Helheim in a rather vulgar display of power. Baldur discovers what really happened, and kills Hel, even though she didn't actually really do anything wrong and his vindictive energies would have been better spent hacking off Loki's head before he escaped into the wild [***if you still don't get it (like me), make coffee during the story bits, Ed***].

meaningful way, you really can't go wrong with Too Human. Besides, there's something incomparably awesome about playing a god and having everyone kneel when you swagger by. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

You might expect

Better Than

It could have been

Worse Than

PC
360 ■
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A fantastic game that almost everyone will probably hate because Yahtzee hated it.

79
OUT OF 100

RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Electronic Arts | **Distributor→** Electronic Arts South Africa | **Genre→** Sports | **Age Rating→** 12+

FACEBREAKER

THERE HAVE BEEN MANY half-truths about the nature of *FaceBreaker*; the first game by EA's newly formed Freestyle division. After the brilliant job EA had done with the *Fight Night* series, nothing short of exceptional was expected from *FaceBreaker*. However, *FaceBreaker* is not a boxing simulator at all. It looks like boxing, but it isn't.

While the *Fight Night* series glorified boxing with a revolutionary new control scheme, *FaceBreaker* resorts back to the kind of button-mashing mayhem that fighting games are prone to.

Nevertheless, it is very important to understand what the primary goal of this game is. EA's Freestyle division is all about developing games that appeal to casual gamers, and *FaceBreaker* is ideal for enticing this target market. It doesn't bamboozle the player with being overly complex. Rather, it keeps things simple, and allows the player to experience the most important aspect of playing games: having fun.

The cartoonish graphics make for a vibrant experience as the player can select one of a number of unique characters (or create their own) to take into the ring. The action is unembellished, but extremely fast paced. The control scheme and game dynamic combine well to ensure that a good *FaceBreaker* player will take any button-masher to task, even if button mashing can result in a victory. A series of blocks and counters allows for this, and a skilful player, who times these moves correctly, will have an advantage.

One of the best (and most difficult) achievements to master is the use of Breakers. The game features BoneBreakers, GroundBreakers, SkyBreakers and FaceBreakers – very powerful punches that become available in sequence as the player fills a meter onscreen. Each successive punch fills the meter a little, while being hit empties it completely. Getting to the instant-win FaceBreaker punch is, therefore, quite an achievement.

FaceBreaker is the kind of game that you'll want to play online or with friends. It doesn't offer a very strong single-player component, but one gets the impression that it is not supposed to. This game is meant to be a hilarious party title, and it does well to achieve that.

FaceBreaker is definitely not for the 'hardcore' crowd. It's is a fun title that will result in many a friendly rivalry with its fast-paced action and tons of humour. It's not the greatest fighting game ever made, but it certainly has oodles of character. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Better Than

Getting your face broken by Mike Tyson

Worse Than

A proper boxing simulator

360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A hilarious and fun party 'boxing' game.

78
OUT OF 100

ASUS EAH4870 TOP

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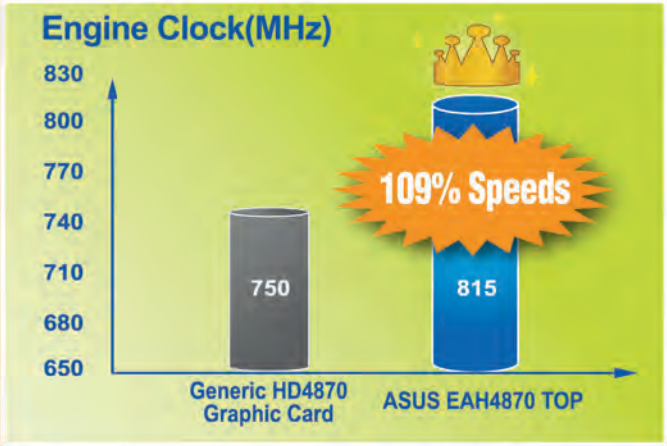

▲ ASUS EAH4870 TOP Provides Enhanced GPU Performances

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WARHAMMER ONLINE: AGE OF RECKONING

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Electronic Arts | **Distributor→** Electronic Arts South Africa | **Genre→** MMORPG | **Age Rating→** 12+ | **PC Spec→** 1 2 3 4 5

WHEN EA ANNOUNCED THAT *Dark Age of Camelot* developers, Mythic Entertainment, were working on a MMORPG set in the *Warhammer* universe, I was excited. Being a long-time player of the tabletop game, as well as an online gamer looking to play something other than *World of Warcraft*, I was perfectly suited for the role of hyped-up fanboy. However, does *Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning* live up to its name, it's hype, and does it have the muscle to stand its ground in the cutthroat MMO market? From the experiences I've had during my first couple of weeks playing the game, yes – it most certainly does.

Aimed squarely at MMORPG gamers with some experience under their belts, *WAR* is set in the rich, detailed world created by Games Workshop, and does the brand justice at every turn. Veterans of the tabletop game will immediately feel at home: from architecture to NPCs, the game is pure *Warhammer*. Those not familiar with the title's roots, fear not: *WAR* features the best elements of every MMO you've played before, using a *WoW*-influenced mechanic that is easy to pick up, and the pleasure continues to grow as you explore the many unique elements Mythic has brought to the table.

Like most MMOs, *WAR* features two distinct forms of gameplay: PvE (Player vs. Environment), in which players group together or go solo to take on the quest-filled game world; and PvP (Player vs. Player), which involves anything from one-on-one duals to scenario-based warfare and castle sieges. Where *WAR* stands out from the crowd, however, is the unity that the game forms between the two types, and the dynamic and rich system behind both game types. Almost all PvP action that takes place in the game will have an effect on PvE, and *vice versa*. Sometimes certain quests or merchants are only available once the enemy has been sufficiently pushed back in a certain region, and other times the player's quests will simply require them to kill ten members of the enemy faction.

Elements like this truly bring the game world to life. Compared to almost any other MMO, *WAR*'s battlefields and sprawling cities feel alive and dynamic, changing as the war rages on, pulling players deep into the story and making them really feel like they're a part of the game, instead of unnecessary automatons grinding through X levels of questing just to get to the good part.

Right from the start, the game offers a fun, involving and rewarding experience. Players feel compelled to play not just because of the allure of 'phat lewt', but because their every action shapes and moulds the world in which they play. *WAR* has a lot going for it: diverse, enjoyable character classes, exhilarating public quests, epic Realm vs. Realm battles, a rich story and an excellent character-tracking system - to mention a few. It's off to a fantastic start, and with a big name like EA throwing money at the title, it'll likely keep up this pace for some time. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

NAG
MUST PLAY

Most MMORPGs you've played

Better Than

World of Warcraft

As Good As

PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

If you enjoy MMORPGs, you need to play WAR - it's as simple as that.

90
OUT OF 100

117010

The power to do it all!

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RRP→ R599 | **Publisher**→ Electronic Arts | **Distributor**→ Electronic Arts South Africa | **Genre**→ Action | **Age Rating**→ 18+

MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

***MERCENARIES 2: WORLD IN** Flames* was a challenge to review. The game is not bad, but it lacks a certain something. What that is, I just couldn't figure out. How do you review something when you cannot quite say what it is lacking?

Mercenaries 2 is a lot like *Just Cause*: the player pretty much has a license to do whatever they want in a rather large environment. Stealing cars, blowing stuff up, fighting and being the worst sort of nuisance in a free-form world is fun, but it's hardly something that we haven't seen before. In the game, the player gets to undertake missions in exchange for money. The missions generally involve stealing cars, blowing stuff up, fighting, etc., although this time, there are a few goals to achieve as well. The money is used for buying weapons and equipment, but the exercise seems almost pointless when the AK-47-and-RPG combo that the player starts with is enough to get the job done… for the most part. The game dynamic lacks a little 'pop'. It's very repetitive, and the frequency at which annoying enemies jump up from behind virtually every bush in Venezuela gets a little passé after the first few missions.

The game features three playable characters, Jennifer Mui, Mattias Nilsson and Chris Jacobs. Each character has special abilities:

- Mattias Nilsson (voiced by Peter Stormare who starred in *Constantine*) - In-game special ability: Regenerates health at a faster rate.
- Christopher Jacobs (voiced by Phil LaMarr) - In-game special ability: Carries extra ammo.
- Jennifer Mui (voiced by Jennifer Hale) - In-game special ability: Runs faster.

The graphics aren't shoddy, but they certainly aren't the best we've seen on the Xbox. They're clear enough, but they aren't flashy at all. The same applies to the sound. The control scheme is nice enough, but it doesn't do much by way of showing how these things should be cobbled together.

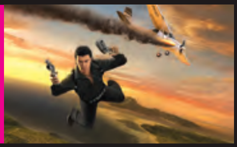
Now that I think of it, I know what the game lacks. It's not bad, but it has no feature that stands out when compared to other games. *Mercenaries 2: World in Flames* is average in almost every way… except maybe for the amount of times you get to blow things up.

If you're willing to perform repetitive tasks, you may enjoy this title. It has a few mildly funny scenes, and there is a lot to keep the player busy. Just don't expect to be blown away by it. Oh well… **NAG**

Walt Pretorius

Kinda like

Just Cause



For Fans of

Explosions

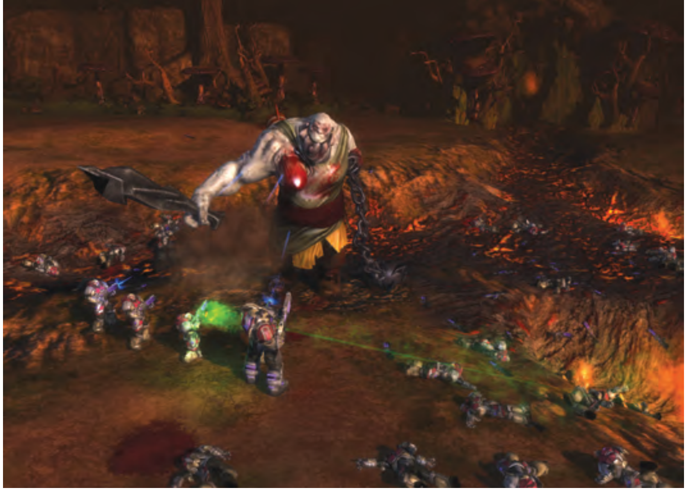
PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

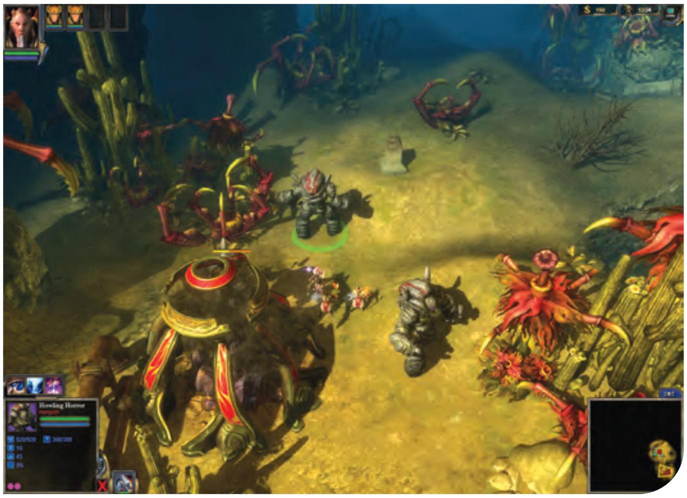
Bottom Line

This could have been a great game, but something is amiss…

75

OUT OF 100





WORLDSHIFT

IF YOU LOOKED AT the genre, you might be wondering, "Action RTS... WTF?" Some years ago, a little game developer called Blizzard Entertainment released a title called *Warcraft III*. This game claimed to be a new evolutionary step in real-time strategy, styling itself an "RPS"(role-playing strategy). The idea was that because your force was led by a hero character with customisable (in a limited sense) skills, there was a supposed element of role-playing. Although RTS fans were first alarmed by this, fearing a radical departure from their favourite genre, it turned out that little had actually changed. Enter *WorldShift*, which introduces elements of hack-and-slash RPGs to RTS. Or is it the other way around?

The game's sci-fi premise is an awkward blend of the original and the ultra-clichéd. An alien artefact starts 'xenoforming' (the alien version of "planetary engineering") Earth, and thousands of years later, much of humanity has mutated into what can best be described as high-fantasy elves! Three factions take part in the action in this game: the non-mutated humans (who look much like the Imperium factions in *Warhammer 40,000* and its spin-offs); the aforementioned elf-like mutants; and the aliens themselves.

In-game graphics are quite good, but unfortunately, that's about it. The game itself is one of the most generic and lacklustre RTS titles ever, borrowing much and innovating little, and with an identity crisis thrown in. An example to illustrate: two special characters, a shaman and a healer, run into a group of enemies. The shaman starts lobbing fire bolts, while the healer patches up the wounds inflicted on the shaman by the enemies. Sadly, the fire bolts don't deal all that much damage, but the enemies can't outpace the healer. Net result: five or ten minutes of watching a completely automatic encounter, while you twiddle your thumbs! This sort of thing happens rather a lot in this game, making it quite tedious. In an action-RPG game, at least the units would be gaining experience points or something, but not so here – here the player's faction evolves, but only between missions, and at a predetermined rate, not based on performance. At least the story is quite engrossing, even if not particularly special. **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

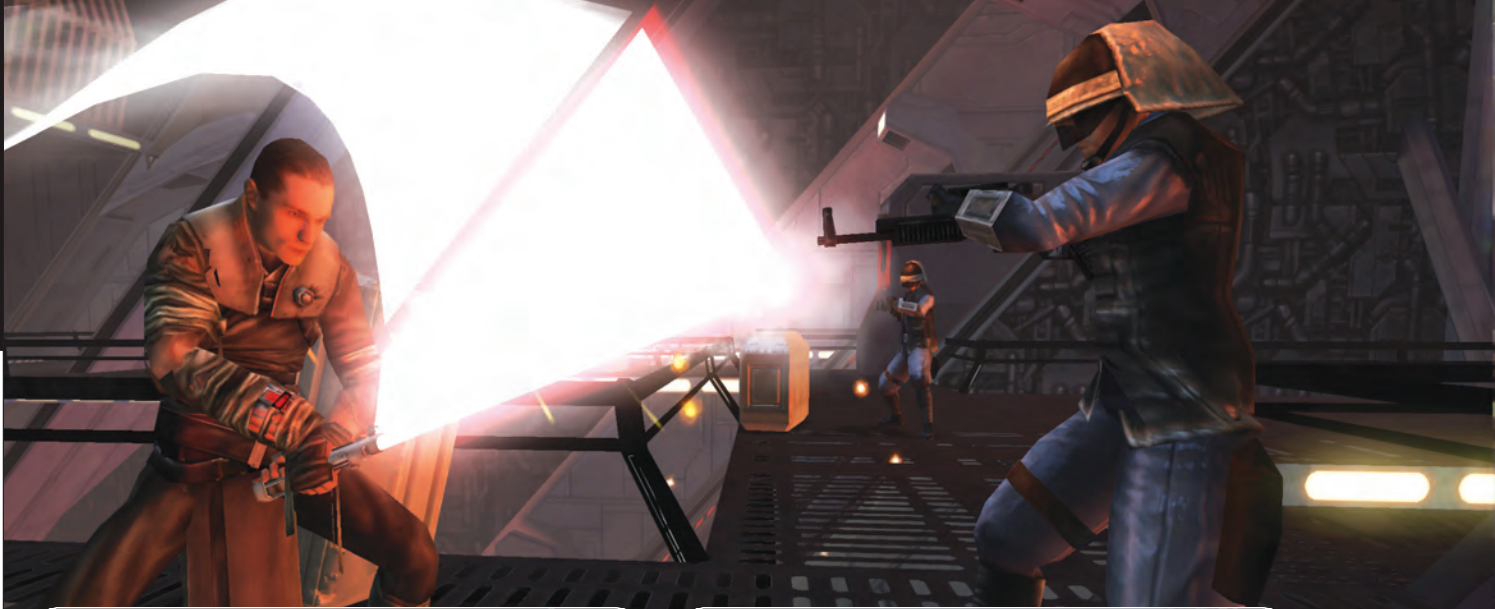
Bottom Line

A lacklustre, unoriginal and utterly uninspired carbon copy.

55

OUT OF 100

RRP→ R299 | **Publisher→** Playlogic | **Distributor→** Ster Kinekor Games | **Genre→** Action RTS | **Age Rating→** 12+ | **PC Spec→** 1 2 **3** **4** 5



RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action | **Age Rating→** 16+

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS after the release of the first movie in the series, the *Star Wars* franchise is still one of the best-known and best-loved entries in modern science fiction, and to this day, it still continues to spawn a variety of wildly successful comics, novels, games and movies in seemingly inexorable fashion. Of course, for all the fiscal success *Star Wars* games have enjoyed over the years, few of them were actually enjoyable after stripping away the shiny licensing. Console owners in particular have had a raw deal up to now, but LucasArts seeks to alleviate this with perhaps its most ambitious release yet, *The Force Unleashed*.

The game is billed as giving you mastery over the mysterious Force in ways that no game ever has before, and to this end, *The Force Unleashed* mostly succeeds. Set between the events of *Episodes III* and *IV*, *The Force Unleashed* tells the story of Galen Marek, a hitherto unknown apprentice of Darth Vader. The game's initial stages see him seeking out and exterminating the last remaining members of the Jedi Order, as per Vader's orders, but the story soon becomes more interesting, throwing in a few surprising twists while simultaneously filling in many of the gaps between the new and old trilogies in the *Star Wars* fiction.

Perhaps more important than the storyline is the game dynamic, and more specifically, the way in which Force powers are implemented, and it's here that *The Force Unleashed* has its greatest success. Backed by an impressive physics engine, the game allows you to fling groups of stormtroopers around, blast foes with lightning, grab objects in the environment to use against your enemies, or even to hurl your lightsaber like a throwing star. The visual presentation of all these abilities does well to convey the sense that one is in control of an incredibly powerful Sith warrior, which makes playing the game a very engaging experience, if slightly too short-lived.

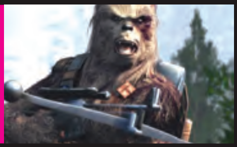
Less engaging, however, are the sluggish and awkward controls. Galen doesn't feel quite as responsive in this version of the game as he should be, and targeting the correct objects and enemies, especially in crowded environments, can be frustratingly difficult. The visuals are impressive, with detailed character models and mostly fluid animations. The cut-scenes, however, fall short, being rendered by the PS2 in real time, with clunky animations that disrupt the flow of the game. In terms of sound, a typically epic *Star Wars* score is present, along with the familiar lightsaber effects that no *Star Wars* game would be complete without. The voice acting, too, is competent, though the recording quality of the clips leaves something to be desired.

Ultimately, *The Force Unleashed* is an enjoyable experience, if only in respect of the Force powers it puts you in control of, and the loose ends it ties up in the *Star Wars* canon. Uninspiring enemies, occasional shoddy controls, and some rough-around-the-edges cut-scenes plague it, but for the *Star Wars* junkie lurking in all of us, it's a good way to kill a few hours. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

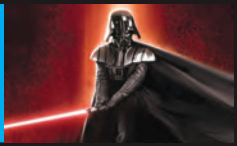
Better Than

Being hunted by a Wookiee



For Fans of

The Force



PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2 ■
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

A new and exciting take on the Star Wars franchise.

70
OUT OF 100

STAR WARS: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

WHO DOESN'T LIKE TO play as the bad guy? And as far as awesome bad guys go, it's tough to beat the adult Anakin Skywalker, better known by his Sith name, Darth Vader. In this game, you get to start off playing him, but this is only as a means to finding the character that you will actually be playing, known only as Starkiller, Vader's unauthorised apprentice. In order to 'graduate', Starkiller is tasked with hunting down rogue Jedi knights. But all this is probably old hat to you: last month we ran a review of the Xbox version of this title. So how does the PSP version compare?

The story presented is identical to that in the home console versions, and even the game action is very, very similar. Obviously, with less under the hood, the full physics and psychology simulations can't be completely duplicated, but the game makes a very credible attempt. Although environment destructibility is handled by 'cheating' (a texture is replaced by another when, say, a wall gets damaged by a lightsaber, and a particle animation plays), the overall effect is pretty impressive. In fact, I found this entire game to be very impressive, given that it's running on a handheld system. Unfortunately, occasionally the game will freeze for a couple of seconds while it loads content, but this is acceptable in its infrequency. In terms of graphics, my only other complaint is that it can sometimes be difficult to make out a character model on a dark background. But the rest of the time, the animations and effects are downright spectacular.

The control interface is quite intuitive, making good use of the PSP's layout and limited shoulder triggers, and despite the occasional annoying pure button-mashing bit. Oh, and this version includes some bonus content not available in the Xbox version: an extensive photo and concept art gallery, which is collected piecemeal by finding special items within the game, and which are usually concealed. Overall, this is one of the finest PSP titles I have seen (just too bad that it is a once-through journey, so replay value is limited). **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

RRP→ R399 | **Publisher→** Activision | **Distributor→** Megarom | **Genre→** Action | **Age Rating→** 16+

PC 360 PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

A highly cinematic action-fest that fills the gap between Episodes III and IV of the saga.

78
OUT OF 100

RRP→ R599 | **Publisher→** Microsoft | **Distributor→** MiDigital | **Genre→** Life Simulation | **Age Rating→** 3+

VIVA PIÑATA: TROUBLE IN PARADISE

WHEN IT COMES TO games designed for kids and adults, older gamers often find themselves wondering exactly what the point is. Surely, a game designed to capture a child's attention and being easy enough for them to play wouldn't satisfy an adult or teenager's need for a complex, challenging and, most importantly, entertaining videogame, would it? Wrong... developer Rare has proven it before and has done it again with *Viva Piñata: Trouble in Paradise*.

This time, danger looms in the lush tropics of Piñata Island. The nefarious but somewhat inept Professor Pester and his crew of hooligans have erased the island's piñata database, and it's up to you to repopulate the system, one papery critter at a time.

Like its predecessor, *VP2* is an über-cutesy party game in which the player is given the task of collecting a large number of living piñata, by satisfying various requirements via the meticulous task of gardening. It might sound a little odd, and it is. However, underneath the mountain of rainbow-coloured candy and bright-eyed critters lies a solid, if somewhat shallow, management mechanic that could hold its own against a good handful of popular management/life-simulation games such as *Black & White* and *The Sims*. Players will have to work hard at tending their garden and balancing their piñata population if they want to succeed, all the while finding new and creative ways (often involving a swift whack from a shovel) to deal with Professor Pester's meddling.

The basic gameplay system is largely unchanged from the original, but there are a number of improvements and extras to keep players interested. While the overall goal is to identify and own at least one of every piñata in the game, there is a constant supply of piñata-specific objectives to fulfil. These require the player to ensure that garden visitors are kept in a state of happiness, and have them shipped off to locations around the world where snotty children armed with wooden clubs will take turns whacking them until their sugary insides rain down. While the idea is undeniably brutal, fear not: there's only the slightest hint of the actual goings-on once your favourite piñata has been shipped, and you get them back in one piece after a period of time.

As fun and cute as the game is, it becomes monotonous after a while, with most piñata easily attainable simply by growing and/or buying the new plants and accessories you unlock by levelling up. Thankfully, the game offers a reprieve from single-player repetition by letting a friend or three visit your garden, help with a few chores and even interact with your creatures. Offline, all a second player needs to do is grab another controller, hit the start button and they're in. Online and System Link are also available, enabling up to four players to garden in harmony, making for the most powerful gardening force this side of the BBC. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Worse Than

Harvest Moon

As Good As

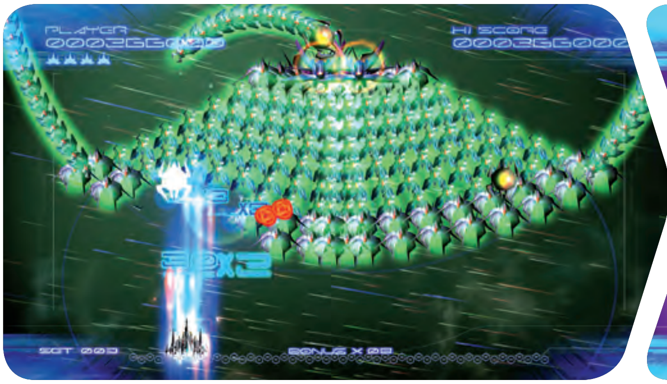
Viva Piñata

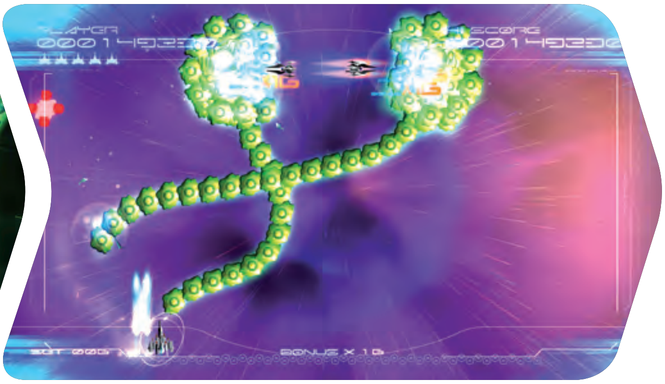
PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Plenty to do, but it lacks depth.

74
OUT OF 100





GALAGA LEGIONS

RRP→ 800 MS Points | **Publisher→** Namco Bandai | **Distributor→** XBLA | **Genre→** Arcade Shooter | **Age Rating→** 12+

LIKE A COSMIC EVENT unnoticed in the galaxy, *Galaga Legions* casually births a new sub-genre in the shoot-'em-up genre – these things happen all the time. From the creators of the trippy and perpetually morphing *Pac-Man*, the studio behind this inspired revision of the 1981 classic has a penchant for rekindling the fires under halcyon arcade titles.

Whereas the established shoot-'em-up design places an emphasis on dodging a barrage of bullets, *Legions* flips this over and instead uses the enemies as the barrage patterns. Swarms of enemies enter the playfield on the heels of graceful lines and splines, showing the path they will take. These enemy paths exist to help you plan where to place yourself relative to the imminent attack, as well as position the other new gameplay element: invincible attack bits that either remain linked to you for additional firepower, or dropped individually on the playfield facing in one of the cardinal directions. Placement is key, and means the difference between life and death.

Enemy swarms usually have a terminating unit that, when shot, causes the entire line of Galaga to explode (important for 'score-attack' as you get the maximum multiplier). The combination of strategic placement and these terminating units creates an entirely new and unique experience.

Galaga Legions is hard, with each step further into the five stages taking you higher up the difficulty curve. Approach with caution and respect – but enjoy a breath of fresh air. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line

Hello old friend. I see you've gotten a face-lift and learnt some new tricks.

70
OUT OF 100

RATCHET & CLANK: QUEST FOR BOOTY

RRP→ R249 | **Publisher→** Sony Computer Entertainment Europe | **Distributor→** Ster Kinekor Games | **Genre→** Action Adventure | **Age Rating→** 7+

PICKING UP RIGHT WHERE *Tools of Destruction* left off, the latest entry in Insomniac Game's renowned *Ratchet & Clank* series might not be as lengthy or deep as its predecessors, but it doesn't skimp in terms of entertainment. Available on Blu-ray Disc and as a full game download (albeit quite a bulky one, at 3.2GB) from the PlayStation Store, *Ratchet & Clank: Quest for Booty* sees Ratchet beginning his search for Clank, following the latter's abduction at the end of the last game.

Intended primarily as a stopgap between *Tools of Destruction* and the next full-length entry in the series, slated for a 2009 release, there aren't too many drastic plot-twists introduced in this instalment, but the script is nonetheless engaging, thanks in no small part to the abundance of humour for which the series is known. In this instance, much of the wit is provided by the pointed banter exchanged between the two narrators of the story, namely Rusty Pete and the now-disembodied (quite literally) head of Captain Slag.

Of course, the series is also well known for giving players a tremendously vast arsenal of weapons whose power is matched only by their absurdity, and plenty of enemies on which to use them. Sadly, this is where *Quest for Booty* falls a little short of the mark. The game is short, spanning no more than four hours at the most, and although there's still an impressive array of weaponry available (including the Tornado Launcher and Fusion Grenade, amongst others), it's still rather scaled-down by *Ratchet & Clank* standards. Many of the weapons are also given to you automatically at certain points in the game, rather obviating the need to track down and collect every last bolt to purchase weaponry upgrades. *Quest for Booty* does, however, introduce one significant new concept to the game dynamic, namely the "Kinetic Tether," which allows the wrench to almost magnetically push and pull objects in the environment around, making for some fresh and interesting platform-puzzle segments.

Visually, *Quest for Booty* cannot be faulted, with lusciously detailed locations, superb lighting effects, and a frame rate that never misses a beat. Add to this a well-arranged score, convincing audio effects, and the high-quality voice acting that is typical of the series, and it becomes apparent that while *Quest for Booty* might not be long enough, it's certainly well presented.

It's by no means as epic an adventure as *Ratchet & Clank* fans are used to, but *Quest for Booty* eschews the usual depth of the series in favour of an experience that's focused more on traditional platform action and puzzle-solving, and it does so quite successfully. The absence of Clank is certainly felt, as is the relative scarcity of weaponry, but this bite-sized instalment in the highly successful franchise achieves exactly what it was intended to. It's a tantalising serving of the fundamental elements that make the *Ratchet & Clank* series great, and it'll have fans awaiting the offbeat duo's next appearance with bated breath. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

Other Ratchet & Clank games

Kinda like

Old-fashioned platform gaming

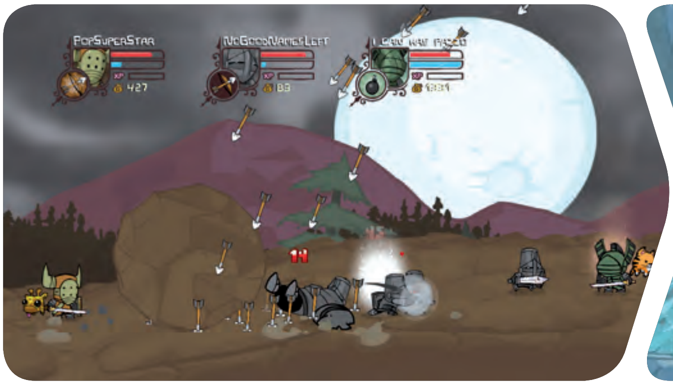
For Fans of

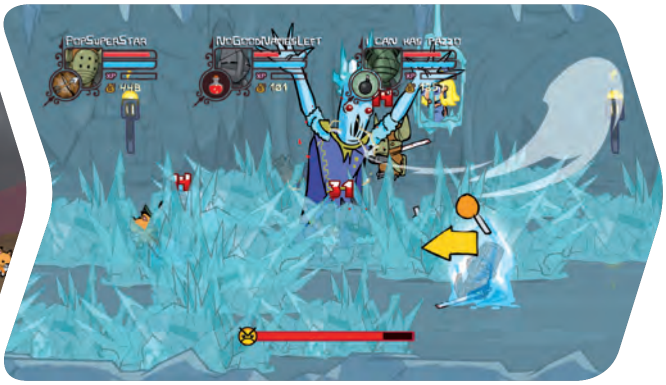
PC
360
PS3
WII
PS2
PSP
DS
MOB

Bottom Line

Good entertainment at a not-too-unreasonable price.

74
OUT OF 100





CASTLE CRASHERS

RRP→ 1,200 MS Points | **Publisher**→ The Behemoth | **Distributor**→ XBLA | **Genre**→ Beat 'em Up | **Age Rating**→ 16+

GAMERS ARE SIMPLE CREATURES. Modern games can obscure the core goodness that players really want with layers of sophistication that is really a kind of 'cruft'*.

Therefore, everyone in the know has been salivating over *Castle Crashers* in the two years since it was unveiled. *Castle Crashers* is a four-player, beat-'em-up action game in the vein of classic arcade games – such as *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* – seasoned with just the right dash of RPG elements and a ton of quirky characters to grind; wrapped up in vast amounts of hilarious animation by iconic Internet artist, Dan Paladin, and developed by guys (The Behemoth) who worship hardcore games of yore.

Few games have genuinely been worth the wait, but *Castle Crashers* is an exception to the rule. It has an excellent control scheme, an elegant combat system that's fun to mash and deep to explore, dozens of levels and bosses, plenty of characters, a quirky, unexpectedly awesome soundtrack, and literally some of the finest 2D art and animation in the history of the genre.

Even the multiplayer component of the game is more sensible than most retail 360 titles: any combination of users can party together, split across local and online player slots. There's very little wrong with the game. Aside from no drop-in, dropout co-op, some may balk at the higher than average price of 1,200 Microsoft Points, but *Castle Crashers* is the best entry the side-scrolling beat-'em-up genre has seen in a decade or more, and is **the game you need to play** on Xbox LIVE Arcade this summer. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

NAG
MUST PLAY

PC **360** PS3 WII PS2 PSP DS MOB

Bottom Line
Is this game good?
Read on.
90
OUT OF 100

---

*Cruft is computing jargon for code, data, or software of poor quality. The term is also used for the fluff that accumulates on computer equipment. – Wikipedia

A REAL SCION

Lara Croft used to be a guy. Well, back in 1993 when preliminary work began on *Tomb Raider* over at Core Design in Derby (UK), the game's protagonist was an unnamed, undefined male character. As development got underway and the gameplay drifted subtly in a direction that needed more boobs, however, the character was redrafted as a cold, militaristic South American woman named "Laura Cruz." Then "Laura" was dropped in favour of the more American "Lara," and "Cruz" abandoned for the quintessentially English-sounding "Croft." At some point in between, most of her clothes fell off.

NUDE RAIDER

Developed externally, a so-called "Nude Raider" patch (inevitably) appeared shortly after the game's release, relieving Lara of what few scraps of cloth she had covering her bits and revealing the now-shameless hussy in all her low-poly glory. Eidos had a hissy fit, and served all sorts of tersely worded cease-and-desist letters, although a quick Google search demonstrates their otherwise complete inability to stand in the way of the Internet.

TOMB RAIDER

HAVING RETURNED FROM A tour of casual site desecration and murder of the local indigenous (and likely endangered) fauna amongst the snow-ridden peaks of the Himalayas, privileged aristocrat, professional grave robber and hobbyist gymnast, Lara Croft, is contacted by Larson Conway, a representative from Natla Technologies, and offered a job doing more of the same over in Peru. After washing her hair, reloading her guns, and laughing brashly in the face of her archaeological mandate to preserve the delicate dignity of history, Lara flies off to the lost city of Vilcabamba and the tomb of Qualopec to loot it for some gaudy trinket called the Scion. She also kills some wolves, bats, bears, Velociraptors, and a Tyrannosaurus Rex, and even manages to avoid a couple of dart traps because she's so awesome.

Emerging dusty and all exhilarated with having just killed a bunch of dinosaurs ("Well, they're extinct now!"), Lara is promptly and rather rudely dispossessed of her recently acquired prize by Larson, narrowly avoiding a somewhat inconvenient extinction of her own and adding the treacherous American's name to her list of 'People To Kill In Egypt Later In The Game'. Determined to find out why Natla Technologies has betrayed her, Lara breaks into the CEO's office and discovers a medieval manuscript detailing several others bits of Scion that nobody had thought to mention previously, apparently strewn hither and yon across the planet. A lot of swimming and jumping around and pulling levers and shooting and stuff ensue, and eventually all of these seemingly disparate activities converge in foiling the nefarious (if wildly unlikely) efforts of an immortal Atlantean diva to return to tyrannical power. Lara then celebrates with a franchise frenzy spanning more than fifteen games across every conceivable platform, two crap movies, and a series of Lucozade adverts, and in 2008, she totally bagged second place in GameFly's list of Hottest Chicks Ever. That's how she rolls. **NAG**

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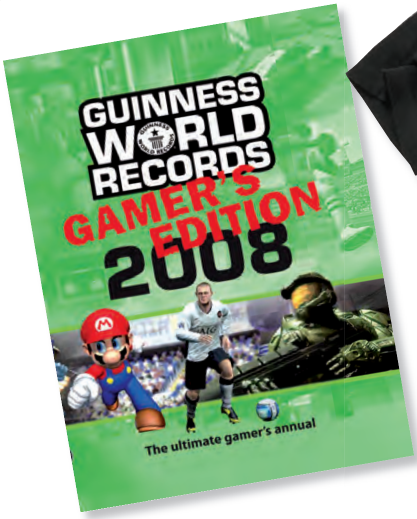

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OVERCLOCKING EXTRAVAGANZA!

NAG

WIN

COMPONENTS

CPU: Intel QX9770
RAM: OCZ DDR2-1200 Reaper (4GB)
HDD: Samsung HD322HJ (320GB)
CASE: Cooler Master HAF 932
GPU: eVGA GeForce GTX280 Superclocked
MOTHERBOARD: Biostar T-power I45
OPTICAL DRIVE: Sony BDU-X10S Blu-ray
DISPLAY: Samsung SyncMaster T260
KEYBOARD/MOUSE: Logitech Cordless Desktop MX 3200 Laser

- SMSes will be charged at R5 each
- Winners will be notified by telephone
- Judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into
- You'd also better get permission from the person who pays the cellular phone bill
- Competition closes on the 30 November 2008

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ASPIRE PREDATOR

AFTER A BRIEF STINT in Europe, Acer has decided to launch its range of gaming desktop PCs locally. The Acer Predator (or the more sedate Aspire G770, if you'd prefer) is a prebuilt, all-in-one solution for those looking for a powerful gaming rig without fussing too much with complicated hardware configurations. Like its competitors from Dell and HP, the Predator does its absolute best to pack as much into the high-end options as possible, and isn't afraid to charge for it.

Acer is offering the Predator in four flavours, ranging from the moderately impressive to the downright jaw-dropping, although they all share a few common snags. The first thing you'll notice is the fantastic chassis – something you'll be pleased to know is standard across the range. The elegant yet chunky, *Transformers*-esque case is certain to catch a few eyes, and goes especially well with the colour-matched widescreen monitor, which is unfortunately sold separately. All machines feature a custom-designed MSI motherboard based on the 780i chipset – one of the product's biggest drawbacks; sticking to DDR2 seems ridiculous given the price. Also common throughout the range is Blu-ray support (either through a BD-ROM or a BD-RW in the higher range) as well as a water-cooling system built directly into the case - apparently requiring zero maintenance for a minimum of five years.

Looking at the other specs – they're mostly decent but give a few surprises where you'd least expect. The entry-level machine, the Sniper II, features a Q9550 CPU, 4 gigs of DDR2-800 and a pair of Seagate 640GB hard drives. Unfortunately, those components are forced to team up with two 9600GTs running in SLI – when it comes to price vs. performance, perhaps the weakest combination available in this generation of video cards. Thankfully, as the price increases through the range, so does the performance – the next version doubles the RAM, throws in a 10K 150GB Raptor drive and gives the user two 9800GTXs to play with – this is a little more like it! At the top end, which is set to retail for a staggering R60,000, we see a QX9650, a BD-RW drive, two GTX280s and a total of 2.3TB of hard drive space, spilt among four drives.

It's clear that these machines have potential, even at the entry-level. However, the South African market might not be as rich as Acer has been hoping. Even the baby of the series weighs in at a cool R28,000 – well above the price that most gamers are willing to spend on a much higher-spec'd machine. Time will tell just how successful the Predator will be in the African heat – perhaps the allure of high specs and shiny orange casing will keep customers interested, as long as Acer's after-sales support can match the price tag.

HARDWARE Q&A

HARDWARE SHOOTOUTS

"**FIRSTLY, MY THANKS FOR** such a high quality magazine. I buy dead tree magazines because I often fly further than my laptop's battery will last. I specifically buy NAG for its higher-than-average quality - from the paper used to the beautiful photos. Lately I have been disappointed by the quality of a few of the technical articles though. However this must be qualified - "disappointed" because I am used to better from NAG, and therefore know that NAG can do better.

Now, I am somewhat of an AMD fanboy - firstly they have undeniably superior technology, but also just because they are the underdog of the industry. Despite this, I am more than a little offended by the article in which you lauded the performance of the AMD Phenom X4 over the Intel Core2. In this article you explained that the memory in the Intel system was set to run at an artificially lowered speed, and this was then "justified" by saying that it was done "to even out the playing field". The argument that running the Phenom at a multiplier of 13 would result in an overclocked system being pitted against a default speed system is self-defeating: If overclocking is not valid, then surely the same goes for underclocking in any form? Secondly, Intel can hardly be blamed for the fact that AMD uses a lower speed on their memory bus; and thirdly, if you compare systems based on the premise of "similarly priced" systems (which I applaud), then you want to see and compare the best that each system can deliver.

CPU performance is actually irrelevant: Overall system performance is what matters. In fact, no single component being faster than that of the competition matters. A fast CPU in a slow system is still a slow system. Which brings me to my request.

Please explain the concept of performance bottle necks, and make these central to performance discussions. When up-ing the "speed" of a single component in a system does not result in a correlating increase in performance, the simple matter of the fact is that the subject component was NOT the bottle neck. It is important to note that any component which is not the present performance bottle neck in any given situation is at least partially idle. Replacing an already partially idle component with a faster one will only result in more idle time for that component. Compare this to a slow car driving on a dirt road. If you replace the dirt road with a good road, the car will reach its full performance and the passengers will get to their end destination in shorter time. Replace the good road with a five way highway, and no improvement is seen - the bottle neck is not the road any longer, the slow car is. Replace the slow car with a fast car, and the passengers will again experience a improved trip time.

Also, in professional performance measurement, "best performance" is not the only important measure. Good enough performance is! In practical terms, this means that if, for example, a game runs without a hitch with all the needed settings turned on, then investing more money (in better hardware) will not result in a noticeably better gaming experience, even if the improvement can be measured!

On another note, I appreciate that in this world where we are so very connected, with breaking news at our fingertips; it must be hard for any magazine to have relevant content by the time the magazine lands on the shelves. I read most of my news on sites such as DailyTech, Ars Technica and Tech Report. Regardless, NAG manages to have plenty of news bits that I have not heard yet, and herein lies one of the reasons that I continue to buy the magazine. Even more than that, my biggest compliment to NAG: I am not a computer gamer, but I am a NAG regular reader. The reason is simple - you outperform the supposedly technically orientated magazines on your technical content, review quality and news!

I think if you can incorporate some of my suggestions into your future reviews you will gain an even wider audience. So keep up the good work!"

_hartz

I wrote the article comparing the Intel Core 2 Duo E8500 and the Phenom X4 9850. I appreciate your input, and you do make some valid points. For this, I thank you, and I shall be mindful in future of the way the articles are written to avoid confusion or misunderstanding.

I would like to reply to you as directly as possible, so I have put it in bullet form addressing each issue separately where possible.

- *The Phenom X4 9850 has a default multiplier of 12.5 (12.5x200=2,500). Half multipliers on the AM2/AM2+ platforms make it impossible to run 1,066MHz because the HT speed: Memory speed ratio cannot be higher than 1:1 (200:200 x 4 (800MHz RAM)), as that would need a 1:1.33 ratio, which is not possible with half multipliers. We compared the CPUs directly on as similar a system as possible. In any such comparison, one*

ON THE HORIZON FROM LOGITECH

At a recent "behind-closed-doors" event, Logitech gave us a sneak peek at its upcoming line of peripherals. As usual, their offerings are centred around optimising the user-machine experience, maximising our interactions with technology. Their line-up ranges from work-oriented devices, through the digital home, and right on to enthusiast gaming. No new specifically gaming-oriented keyboards or mice were unveiled, though the new MX1100 mouse (which accompanies the new edition of the WAVE keyboard) is versatile enough for serious applications: serious work, or serious fun! It is based on the MX Revolution design, though much streamlined, and now features an on-the-fly resolution control. The new WAVE keyboard sports the sexy curves of its predecessors, while the new Illuminated Keyboard makes sure that, work or play, you can see what you're doing in any lighting conditions (and looks ultra-sharp to boot!) For racing enthusiasts, an upcoming steering wheel model, which comes complete with pedals and gear-shift, has been designed in collaboration with the lead designers of *Gran Turismo*. The game sports features that are accessible exclusively from this Logitech wheel. Logitech also mentioned a whole new upcoming range of Wii peripherals – we look forward to those!

NAG AWARDS

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.

HARDWARE SCORING SYSTEM

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

5 The stuff of Legends. Buy it while you can, we probably already have.
4 A good deal; worth it if you're shopping for one.
3 About what you'd expect, no problems. You might want to wait for it to go on sale.
2 This has some issues. You should probably shop around for something else if possible.
1 The stuff of Nightmares. You'll probably be sorry you got one, even if it was free.

has to take the lowest common denominator and use that as a base.

- *The Intel Core 2 Duo E8500 system was not underclocked. DDR3 @ 800MHz 5-5-5-15 2T gives the exact performance that DDR2 at 800MHz 5-5-5-12 2T would. The reason DDR2 was not used was because at the time of writing, we had DDR3 motherboards only. The memory was run at exactly the same speed and timings on the Intel system as they were on the AMD system. Where actual CPU clock frequency is concerned, nothing was offset and CPUs were what we were testing.*
- *The comparison was not on the premise of the systems being similarly priced; it was comparing the best Intel had to offer against the best AMD had to offer in game performance. They just so happened to be similarly priced, however; that is because of business factors unrelated and outside the scope of what we were testing. The Intel Core 2 Duo E8500 came out tops when compared against other CPUs in Intel's own product range, and the AMD Phenom X4 9850 BE came out tops when compared against other AMD CPUs. We took the best from each family and put them head to head. With that said, "the best each system can deliver" varies. On the Intel system, running a 333MHz Strap (latch) on a P45 DDR3 board would allow a Performance level of 5, compared to 7 on a P35 or X38 board, for example. The same goes with AMD products - nForce 590SLi has better memory bandwidth than the RD790 based boards. However, only a handful of 590SLI-based motherboards will support Phenom X4 CPUs. So we try to get to even ground, to eliminate other influences in the results that are not purely CPU related.*
- *Unfortunately we were testing an individual part, which was the CPU, so overall system performance was irrelevant for what we were trying to show. Having said that, any system is as fast as its slowest component, but since we were testing CPUs, we eliminated the bottleneck of other components as much as possible so they would not affect the result.*
- *As for performance scaling and performance bottlenecks, nothing in computing has performance scale linearly. Intel, AMD, IBM, ATI, NVIDIA and many other semiconductor companies spend billions in R&D in designing the most efficient circuit from a performance perspective because of this very problem: nothing scales linearly. In every memory bandwidth test available today, DDR2 800 @ 3-3-3-9 1T is not twice the speed of DDR 400 @ 3-3-3-9 1T, irrespective of the memory controller used, its location, internal latencies and configuration. Even in lab conditions, DDR2 would never provide exactly twice the bandwidth. High frequencies make it easier to see where inefficiencies are in any component, but the performance gains, even if 30% from a 100% increase in frequency, are still worth it. Bottlenecks exist everywhere in the system, starting from the software right down to the most mundane piece of hardware.*
- *Every component apart from result contributing parts of a computer system is partially idle. In a graphics card for example, there are processes that will strain the particular parts of the calculation units, such as layered mathematical effects that rely heavily on weighted pixel values and such. They will saturate the math parts of the stream processors but leave the render outputs, texture samplers, combine units and others completely idle. Increasing the core frequency of the GPU may increase the speed at which the idle units are operating, but it also happens to increase the speed at which the calculation units can operate, therefore increasing performance by a factor or percentage lower than expected. The higher frequency decreased efficiency in other parts but increased processing speed in the relevant units.*
- *In a professional performance measurement we tend to deal with absolutes, so we resort to figures (hence "best performance"), more than subjective opinion, which is what "Good enough" would be, as it varies from person to person with no meaningful reference. A game running "without a hitch" and with "all the needed settings turned on" is not a reference we can use. To some, without a hitch is 25fps, to others its 40fps. Some prefer higher resolutions as opposed to AA, others prefer it the other way around and some want a mixture. Unfortunately we cannot quantify nor can we use "without a hitch" as a point of reference. We cannot know what every single person prefers out there. This is why we provide the numbers so people can decide for themselves.*

Your input, as stated before, is appreciated and we shall be sure to integrate some of your suggestions in future.

Neo Sibeko

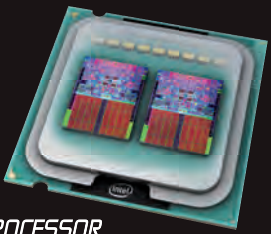
DREAM MACHINE

CHEERS!

THIS WILL BE THE last time we see the current CPU hanging from the lips of the *NAG* lap dancer. Mr Intel, thanks for the memories and congratulations on an amazing run with your 45nm Penryn range of CPUs! As for our GPU, the AMD/ATI 4870X2 remains top of the pops, although NVIDIA is adamant that the 280 is a faster card for tomorrow's applications. I must say... seeing it run *Far Cry 2* made my mouth all wet and mushy. For now though... the ATI is king of the castle. We are undecided with regards to the mouse and are quite keen to remove the mouse and keyboard from this list. What do you guys think? In my opinion, peripherals are subject to personal opinion based on how they feel in your hand.

If you guys have any questions or suggestions, send us a mail with the subject heading Dream Machine to len.nery@tidemedia.co.za

Welcome to the drool....



PROCESSOR

Intel Core 2 Extreme QX9650 [R8,228]
Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530

KEYBOARD

Enermax Aurora [R447]
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

MONITOR

Acer AL2623W 26" Widescreen LCD [R4,999]
Axiz [011] 237-7000

COOLING

Zalman Reserator XT [R3,456]
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

MOUSE

Cyber Snipa Stinger [R399]
Axiz [011] 237-7000

MOTHERBOARD

ASUS Extreme Rampage [R5,789]
ASUS [011] 783-5450

POWER SUPPLY

Zalman ZM1000-HP 1000W [R2,033]
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

GRAPHICS CARD

Sapphire HD 4870 X2 [R6,400]
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

STORAGE

WD Caviar SE16 500GB [R755]
Drive Control [011] 201-8927

MEMORY

Corsair TWIN3X2048-1800C7DF G [R4,699]
Frontosa [011] 466-0038

CASE

Cooler Master Cosmos S [R1,818]
Sonic Informed [011] 314-5800

SOUND

Creative X-Fi Titanium Fatal1ty [R1,799]
Creative

Your PC is a Monster.
Give it a Good Home.

by Neo Sibeko

Change – The Overclocking Game

IT SHOULD BE VERY obvious by now that overclocking is no longer an obscure hobby that a select few individuals engage in on a daily basis. It has grown from a geeky pastime into a key marketing tool for almost, if not all manufacturers and IHVs.

It was not so long ago that Intel took a very dim view on the subject of overclocking, and spent untold sums of money in an attempt to educate the buying public on the dangers of operating components outside of specifications. However, that was a long time ago, and much has changed. When AMD embraced the enthusiast in the FX series, things started to turn around in the industry. While one cannot say it was entirely AMD's FX series that changed the face of overclocking, it was the first time an IHV embraced a radical at the time, but ultimately what would be the modern perspective when it came to overclocking.

Intel has since adopted a similar stance and can be said to have done even more of late, seemingly producing processors and platforms that allow incredible overclocks from every single CPU in their range. From the Q6600, a favourite in gaming circles, to the E8600, which is an enthusiasts dream, the CPUs may not be the best performers per se, but it is in the latent potential where the magic really is.

Instead of buying an Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6850, which may retail for anything up to R10,000, many gamers and casual overclockers are opting for the Q6600, which can easily attain a 3GHz clock speed, in essence giving you the performance of a R10,000 CPU for less than R2,000. More than that, a large number of these Q6600 CPUs are capable of 3.6GHz, and sometimes up to 4GHz. While overclocking is not 'supported' in these CPUs, there has been no real effort by Intel to prevent them from operating at such frequencies through prevention mechanisms on the CPU die itself.

It seems as if it has finally dawned on the IHV's that any product, besides being affordable and fast, must always be able to do more. The promise of 5GHz on the E8600 CPUs is what has led to them selling so quickly, despite the hefty price tag they carry over the E8500. Besides the fact that all E8600 CPUs are E0 stepping, which is the best stepping by far where 45nm CPUs are concerned, the CPU also carries a 10x multiplier which has, for the first time, allowed a large number of enthusiasts to break the 6GHz barrier reliably.

With the introduction of better CPUs, motherboards, memory kits, and graphics cards, manufacturers have been given a new avenue for marketing their brands. One only has to look on HWBOT and see how many overclockers are sponsored, singing the praises of the various manufacturers in their records and scores. Indeed, there's a good chance that the scores posted on HWBOT have a very limited influence on the purchasing decisions of the average user or majority of gamers. However, as was stated in last month's column, it has become very apparent that virtually any motherboard on the market is capable of functioning as the basic building block of a very high-performance gaming machine.

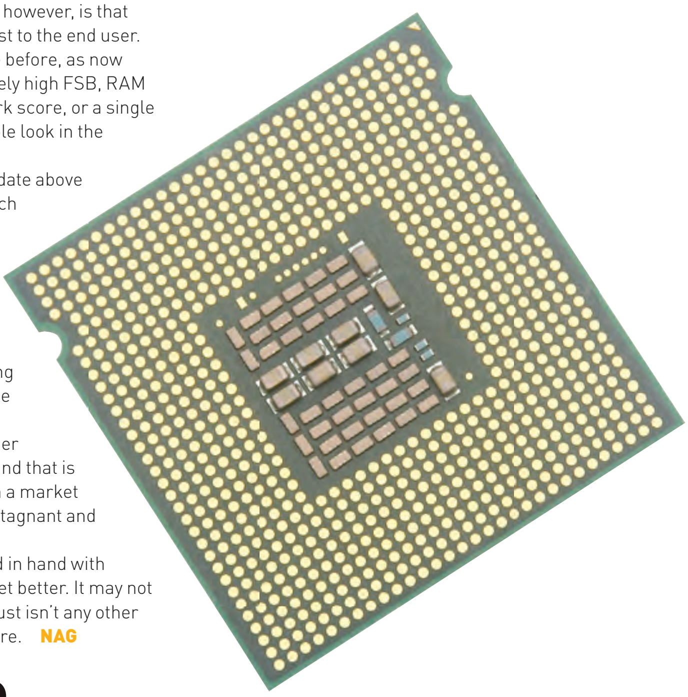
IHVs have realized that, more than great graphics on the packaging, bold but ultimately meaningless claims are, if anything, a waste of ink, and are largely ignored. Now it comes down to the actual work – "can the motherboard overclock or not?" is the question. Lights, custom POST artwork and over-the-top use of heat pipes is not convincing anyone, least of all the enthusiast community. Unlike in many other fields, where overclocking is concerned, the participants happen to be the ones doing the advertising to themselves, and subsequently the gamers who may or may not become owners of these products in the end.

This method of marketing seems to be working as well, because not only have the majority of IHVs started shifting more units, they are now able to charge more for those units than ever before. The difference between then and now however, is that they are now able to justify the cost to the end user. This was not necessarily the case before, as now all one needs to quote is an insanely high FSB, RAM speed, 3DMark, Pi, any benchmark score, or a single components' speed to make people look in the direction of the motherboard.

Any motherboard that can validate above 700MHz will, to some degree, catch the attention of enthusiasts and gamers. DDR3 speeds above the 2.2GHz mark garner the people's attention just as much as a 44K 3DMark05 score will. It may be harder on the various marketing and engineering departments than before, because they need to now produce better products and sell them to a tougher crowd. But one thing is for sure, and that is that they are gaining new users in a market which, for the longest time, was stagnant and in some cases, dwindling.

With enthusiasts working hand in hand with manufacturers, things can only get better. It may not even be a choice, because there just isn't any other way to sell these products anymore. **NAG**

> "Instead of buying an Intel Core 2 Extreme QX6850, many gamers and casual overclockers are opting for the Q6600, which can easily attain a 3GHz clock speed, in essence giving you the performance of a R10,000 CPU for less than R2,000.



SyncMaster T220G
SAMSUNG

Reviewer's Diary

by Derrick Cramer

Rock and roll, gamer style!

DOES THE NAME FENDER ring a bell? How about Marshall? Gibson? Vox? If they don't, it's quite possible you've picked up the right magazine. I mean, who would possibly expect gamers to know all about brand name guitar and guitar equipment manufacturers? If I were to mention Logitech, OCZ or Razer though, chances are you would look at your mouse, keyboard, speakers or the many other peripherals littering the desk of any self respecting gamer.

The relationship between guitar and mouse is easy for the hardcore gamer to see, but for the rest of us, dots need connecting. Guitars are the bread and butter of any rock star, and peripherals to gamers are no different. And, just like a good quality guitar enhances the experience of any song, so too do peripherals enhance the gaming experience we all crave. Up until recently I have never been a fan of peripherals; my six year old IBM mouse served me well enough, allowing the occasional frag or three, until one day it suddenly died. By suddenly died, I mean my cat started chewing on the cable - ironic, no? So I found myself in the market for a new mouse, and started browsing local stores for a cheap replacement. Being left handed made my choice easy; I had one, maybe two brands at best, so I decided on the cheapest in the range, and worked my way over to the counter. My eyes shot out of their sockets at the price, and I somehow missed the irony of spending thousands of rands on overclocking components while tearing up at the thought of spending R300 on such a 'menial' piece of equipment.

Upon arrival at home, I plugged said mouse in and proceeded to scorn its drivers, it's just a mouse after all. Gaming then took a back seat to work for the next few weeks, and after getting used to the shape of the new mouse, it faded into obscurity. Until the very next LAN...

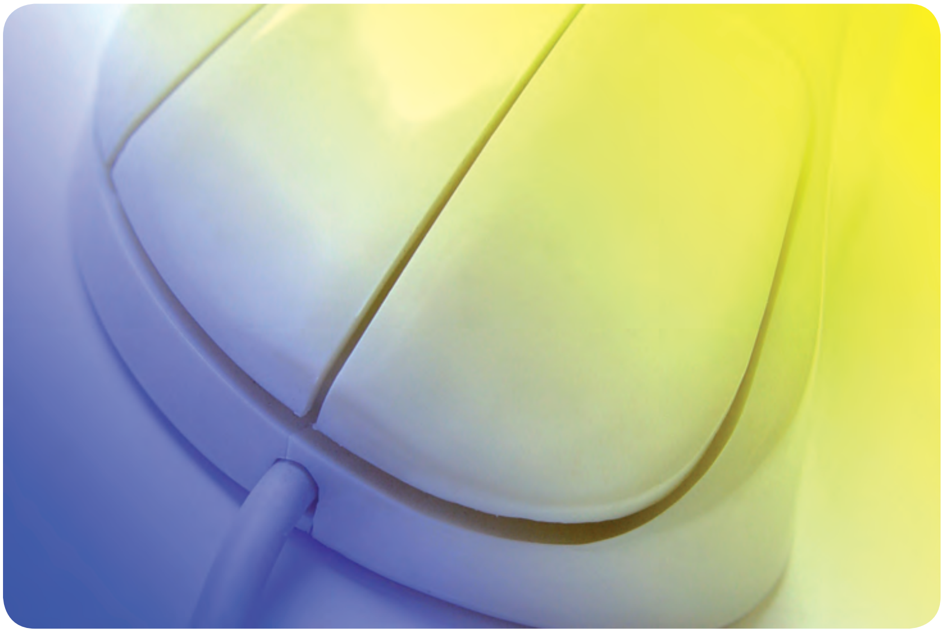
I was playing a different game on a whole new level of skill. Not only that, but the game felt better, more enjoyable, almost as if the mouse had convinced it to be... more fun.

The point of the story is the impact a peripheral can have on how much fun you have in a game - and what an impact it is! Going from a bulky office mouse to a death machine of note made me enjoy the game more, and luckily, this incident is not isolated. A racing wheel/pedal combo makes you feel more like Colin McRae and less like Colin McAverage; a gaming keyboard feels more like a piece of equipment than a secretaries aide, and a metre squared mouse pad... never mind that last one.

These peripherals give you a level of immersion similar to amazing graphics and sound; they draw you into the game and create an atmosphere. The mouse affords you greater accuracy, and the driving wheel gives you the feeling of insane speed. With the introduction of things like the OCZ Neuro Impulse Actuator, which is effectively a headband that you use to assist the mouse and keyboard in games, peripherals will take on a whole new meaning. Once EEG devices are perfected and implemented into a gaming scenario, mind controlling your in-game avatar will be nothing but the start.

While they may be overpriced, and some are completely useless as well as a waste of your time and money, choosing the right peripherals is imperative in allowing you to benefit from the full experience the game has to offer. **NAG**

> "Guitars are the bread and butter of any rock star, and peripherals to gamers are no different. And, just like a good quality guitar enhances the experience of any song, so too do peripherals enhance the gaming experience we all crave.



COOLER MASTER
932
HAF

The future is fusion

WHEN THEN CPU-SPECIALIST AMD purchased then GPU-specialist ATI a couple of years ago now, I know I was certainly left wondering "Why on Earth...?" After all, why would an engineering-rich but marketing-bankrupt ICT manufacturer, join forces with another organisation of almost identical makeup, both trailing the leaders in their respected fields at the time, make for a platform for hitherto unrealised levels of future success? Well, at least the markets being addressed aren't identical, I mused, so the new united company has a couple of angles from which this fantastic success could originate...

And for the two years since then, well that's pretty much exactly what happened. AMD continued to churn out seemingly unfocussed, shot-in-the-dark CPUs which consistently lagged behind their giant US counterpart Intel, and ATI followed suit in the GPU space. Along came dual-core, and then multicore (X3, in AMD speak, meaning three cores), while on the display side the multi-GPU alternative to SLI, Crossfire, was further refined and made more consumer-friendly. But nothing truly remarkable actually emerged from the conjoined company.

Today, says AMD, that remarkable paradigm shift which doubters like me were looking for, has finally come to fruition. Today, we see the birth of a new generation of high-performance computing says the company. Today, we witness the first steps into the tomorrow of microprocessing. It's called Fusion, and to quote the company's newly-adjusted brand tagline, "The Future is Fusion"!

But what's it all really about, Alfie? Hardcore long-term techies like us want more than mere marketing hype and snappy blurbs. We want details on what this new architectural model means to our rigs' performance, and more specifically for this particular feature, just how modern gaming titles will benefit from the change.

All right then.

SERIAL VERSUS PARALLEL PROCESSING

Well we all know just how different a CPU and a GPU, despite essentially performing similar data-crunching functions, are in their operation, yes? Briefly, a CPU is a multi-purpose microprocessor designed to handle a huge variety of workloads, from gaming to data centre management. As such the x86 architecture on which even modern multicore processors are based, is essentially designed around a serial, or linear, compute cycle. Which is to say, commands come in, are executed, and the results sent out before the next command could be dealt with. Sure, this is simplifying things some, and doesn't take into account more modern parallel processing techniques in which tasks are sliced into smaller pieces, and these sub-routines carried out simultaneously to be put back together only at the end of the cycle, but in essence these remain serial processes with a certain level of simulated parallelism built-in. This very nature of the beast is what makes symmetrical multiprocessing a rather high-level solution, as the intelligence required to operate in a truly parallel fashion is substantial.

It was as a result of this singlethreaded environment that the frequency wars raged, as increasing performance meant building a processor which could perform the highest number of calculations per second, pure and simple.

Now a GPU is built with massively parallel scalability in mind, from day one. This is the advantage of a microprocessor committed to performing a single function; it has the architectural freedom to push the limits of performance in that unique operation through unorthodox methods. GPUs in fact have to compute in parallel in order to handle the demanding graphics requirements of modern games, and they are therefore optimised to execute multiple commands all at the same time, with pipelines and stream engines in place to control this distributed processing method and yield a unified result.

At the time of its acquisition, ATI had already started referring to its GPUs as general-purpose processors however, so this first element of Fusion was a natural evolution of the merger. With both types of microprocessors now in-house, AMD was able to make huge strides towards integrating the operations of these two, still distinctly different processor architectures.

Today the company is able to, for instance, take advantage of the exponentially more powerful 512-bit capabilities of a modern ATI GPU as a floating-point mathematics processor. For reference, modern CPUs were only last year, with the advent of multicore, expanded to 128-bit floating point registers, so a 512-bit maths coprocessor represents a

OF AMD

floating-point performance advantage on a gigantic scale!

THE BIRTH OF FUSION

In developing the interoperation of these two architectures, AMD decided that the ultimate solution would, in fact, be a combined CPU and GPU on a single die! The internal codename for this project was Fusion, but this catchy title has spread way beyond just this one future processor, which still remains in the works according to the engineering company – it has become the single-word summation of AMDs entire corporate philosophy moving forwards. And Fusion now represents integration on an almost Utopian scale. It captures the seamless amalgamation of CPU, GPU, and platform itself. It also stresses the critical role of software elements in maximising the potential of this optimised, accelerated computing environment. It even pertains to the strengthening of the relationship between AMD and its hardware and software suppliers so integral to the realisation of the Fusion dream.

The Fusion whitepaper explains that the company believes modern computing is at an inflection point, requiring an innovative new direction if the rapid performance escalation we've come to expect of it is to continue unabated. The combination of three factors; the conflicting demand for higher performance with lower power consumption, the emergence of applications optimised to capitalise on parallel-processing architecture, and the shortage of skills developing such natively multithreaded software, has given rise to this newfound AMD focus.

Typical, really, for such an engineering-driven company. Present it with a significant problem to solve, and it must rise to the occasion and figure out a solution.

IT BEGINS WITH GAMING

So let's look at the first example of Fusion in action, available now from game.amd.com, the AMD Fusion Gaming Utility. I can't tell you how heartening it is, as a once strong supporter of the strange green "A" and always a gamer, that this market is the first focus of this new energy infusing the company. Sure it only makes sense if you consider the ATI side of the business as well, but still it's refreshing after years of being oriented towards power consumption, server solutions, and low cost computing systems.

Now we've seen software-based overclocking tools before. Pretty much every enthusiast-oriented motherboard comes with its own, for instance, and graphics chipsets have been software-

LOOKING BACKWARDS

AMD is a company which believes in delivering on its promises. It ensured us that the AM2 socket configuration would be around for a long time, and with the release of AM2+ and the imminent AM3 designation, it's clear it has kept this promise. AM3 also includes both DDR2 and DDR3 controllers on the CPU, so the choice of which memory technology to use is entirely left to the customer, while the pin configuration of the chip package itself is identical. Not many ICT manufacturers are too keen on backwards-compatibility, but AMD believes in giving the end-user what he or she desires, so...

BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

The company has recently shifted the positioning of its triple-core Phenom X3 parts to compete head to head, on price, with dual-core solutions from its competition. Odd-numbered core-counts are one of the advantages of AMDs true multicore architecture, which doesn't have to scale exponentially. AMD maintains that where a quad-core CPU will yield an approximate 20% performance benefit over similarly-specced dual-core processors, their triple-core product isn't far behind with a performance gain of some 17%. Well worth considering then, if you're keen on capitalising on multicore capabilities at a price point competitive with existing dual-core solutions.

adjustable for even longer. But coming from the days when overclocking meant tweaking circuits themselves with pencils and the like, I've never really taken to them, and have had more than my share of instability in corroboration of this mistrust.

This Fusion utility, however, is more tantalising as it's an all-in-one tool. Pressing a single button on a single application sees the hardware characteristics of your GPU, CPU, and chipset itself, morph into gaming-optimised enthusiast's toys. The dark art of overclocking multiple components distilled into a load-n-click affair.

And as it cranks up frequencies and voltages all (hopefully) harmoniously, this application also sets about prepping for the highest possible framerates on the software layer. It shuts down all resource-consuming non-essential processes on your Windows install, so that your games aren't interrupted by some random request from a minor process for a moment of the system's occupied computing power. Of course, this feature is entirely user-customisable, so you can choose to leave critical security elements running.

Hardcore overclockers might view this as a threat to their very pastime, but AMD intends it more as a means of providing the gaming customer with what he or she wants, a gaming-optimised high-fps machine being stretched to its furthest safe limits for maximum gaming advantage. It's giving the entire market the tools to optimise its hardware to their own performance requirements, to be more holistic about it.

Achieving stability with such a multi-purpose overclocking tool is only possible thanks to the open architecture that AMD has touted for years. And the company is now, under Fusion, expanding this philosophy even further. Or rather, it's expanding its working partner base significantly, and is currently closely entwined with major hardware and software vendors from around the globe, from fields as diverse as CAD rendering to office productivity application providers.

FUSION'S FUTURE

Naturally, the Fusion philosophy is not just about gaming, it's much bigger than that. Consider a huge Excel file filled with complex mathematical calculations being accelerated by a factor of five as the software automatically makes use of the powerful GPU detected, but underutilised while in "office" mode, in the user's PC.

Comments Imi Mosaheb, country manager of AMD SA; "We're now going past the point of two years since we completed our acquisition of ATI, and on the platform side, we've already been aligning ourselves internally for this paradigm shift, with the launch of new products, platforms, and processors simultaneously which support the Fusion model. As the new corporate brand, Fusion is really a lot of things, but perhaps most importantly it is the new AMD culture formalised. It's the gelling of how we believe our future will take shape. Fusion is the solution to problems currently being faced in the global IT industry."

"And it goes way beyond just our own internal stuff. The Fusion philosophy has already driven us into much deeper, more meaningful collaboration with a huge variety of vendors, all with the focussed intent of improving the end-user experience. Take the AMD Live application available now, for instance. It will play any media file or type, without user intervention, simply taking advantage of the API stack around it, updating itself as necessary. If it detects the presence of a DX10-capable GPU, it automatically switches to a 3D, carousel-like display to enhance the users experience. It can operate as a PVR, and be accessed remotely from any device. It's an absolute want-to-have, delivering the user experience demanded of modern computing thanks to close collaboration between software and hardware layers – the essence of Fusion! This philosophy puts customers at the forefront of our efforts, and as one company we're unable to provide for every conceivable customer need, so we're working more closely with the full breadth of the greater industry to achieve this objective."

"In short, it's a head-on, open-kimono approach to the market. Everything is in place now; even the communications side of AMD has been strengthened with the appointment of a new Chief Marketing Officer driving this, and we're ready to drive this message backed up by real-world solutions on the ground," he concludes.

With scalability continuing to be a major focus, Fusion will also assist in driving down the costs of entry-level computing, while continuing with the Opteron commitment of delivering more sheer computing power at the same or lower thermal and power-consumption envelopes.

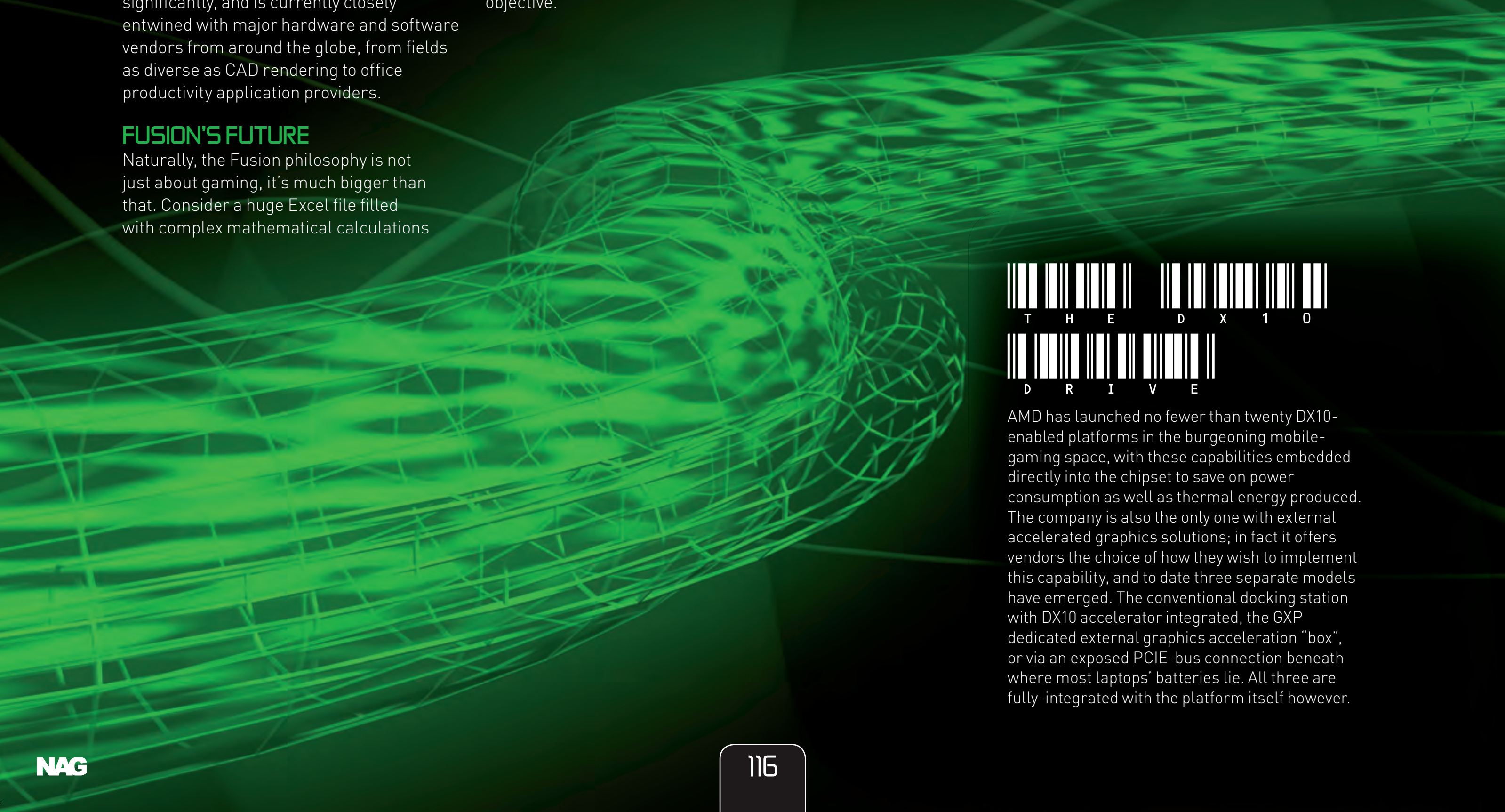
THE AMD WE LOVE IS BACK!

Honestly though, despite real product already being available in the form of the Fusion Gaming Utility (provided you have an AMD 780 or newer-generation chipset), the change in the company energy itself is already tangible. You can feel it speaking to AMD reps over the phone or in person, they're no longer in the brow-beaten, somewhat downtrodden slump they have exuded over the past few years. There's excitement, and vigour, and confidence in future success once more.

Enliven a pair of hardcore engineering entities like AMD and ATI, and great things are likely to come from it. The original Athlon CPU, which rewrote the game when it was released in terms of sheer bang for your buck as well as outright performance leadership, was released amid similar positivity. This useful side-effect of the new philosophy alone makes Fusion an ideal foundation for the future of the entire microprocessor business.

AMD, then, I would have to conclude, is most definitely back, and gaming enthusiasts around the globe can rejoice in that! **NAG**

Russell Bennett



THE DX10 DRIVE

AMD has launched no fewer than twenty DX10-enabled platforms in the burgeoning mobile-gaming space, with these capabilities embedded directly into the chipset to save on power consumption as well as thermal energy produced. The company is also the only one with external accelerated graphics solutions; in fact it offers vendors the choice of how they wish to implement this capability, and to date three separate models have emerged. The conventional docking station with DX10 accelerator integrated, the GXP dedicated external graphics acceleration "box", or via an exposed PCIE-bus connection beneath where most laptops' batteries lie. All three are fully-integrated with the platform itself however.

ASUS M3A79-T DELUXE

All-in-one Solution for Extreme Overclocking Potentials

The new ASUS M3A79-T DELUXE is a motherboard capable of delivering higher overclocking, better graphics and fast Internet access. Integrated with the latest AMD 790FX/SB750 chipset that provides an innovative new power design to support 140W powered CPUs, the M3A79-T DELUXE features HyperTransport™ 3.0, quad PCIe 2.0 x16 slots; and ATI Quad CrossFireX™ and AMD OverDrive™ (AOD) support. Additionally, the innovative ASUS Precision Tweaker 2 offers ultimate overclocking potentials with meticulous 0.02v adjustment per step for the NB, SB and DRAM voltages - working in tandem with the AMD AOD for customized overclocking settings in Windows for greater performance tuning margins. This motherboard also incorporates the ASUS Express Gate, which only takes 5 seconds* to go online from bootup without entering Windows for excellent entertainment options; and utilizes only the highest quality power components like: low RDS (on) MOSFETs, Ferrite core chokes, and most importantly 100% high quality Japan-made conductive polymer solid capacitors for higher power efficiency, better stability and lower temperatures for the best overclocking results while providing longer component lifespans.

*Actual boot time is subject to hardware configurations and product models.

Aggressive fan profile keeps the card cooler than all other 4870X2 cards

895MHz makes it the highest clocking AMD/ATI card we have ever reviewed.

MSI R4870X2 OC EDITION

RRP→ R6,400 | **Supplier→** Pinnacle Micro | **Website→** www.pinnacle.co.za | **Brand→** MSI

AMD/ATI'S R700 IS NOT new nor is it 'hot news' anymore. Therefore MSI's OC Edition is not going to change the gaming world, nor will it deliver anything that any other 4870X2 cannot deliver. After all, it is exactly what is now referred to as a reference design board, which is actually inaccurate because there's no design element to it. It is what every other AIB orders from AMD/ATI. It has the exact same cooler, exact same PCB, colour, power requirements, etc.; it is an exact replica of what many other AMD/ATI partners sell to the public.

To make matters even worse for the MSI R4870X2, it features an arcane BIOS that has some minor incompatibilities with some motherboards, (albeit only a few boards), and sometimes has trouble working in mixed mode with other 4870X2 cards from other manufacturers.

The overall package is very minimalist and it costs about the same as any other 4870X2 on the market. Very few products are this plain and even the presentation is generic. Nothing in the packaging and even performance department stands out on this card. The slight overclock is meaningless as it's a paltry 20MHz on the core, which adds very little if anything to any synthetic score and is outright nullified in the majority of games.

If the aforementioned makes you think that the MSI R4870X2 OC Edition is possibly the worst 4870 on the market, you would be gravely mistaken. All the criticisms we have about the MSI card are nothing compared to everything else that it does right. Many of the shortfalls are not because of MSI failing to produce a worthwhile card. They are merely criticisms that can be levelled at the majority of 4870X2 cards on the market, and therefore are criticisms of AMD/ATI's design and not necessarily the board partner.

Where the R4870X2 does better than other 4870X2s we have tested is in the thermal department, because it has a far better fan speed-control profile than the others do. On average, the MSI R4870X2 was 14° to 20°C cooler than the other 4870X2 cards when idle and a good 10°C cooler under load. Besides operating cooler, fan noise was not intrusive and could be adjusted by several of the freely available tools on the Internet.

As impressive as the fan profile is however, it is not enough to place the R4870X2 OC Edition ahead of any other competing graphics card. What makes this particular card great is the incredible overclocking headroom it has. No other 4870X2 or regular 4870 comes close. We are used to seeing 850MHz on the core on R700 parts, but the MSI card managed a scorching 895MHz! While other 4870X2 cards cannot finish 3DMark06 at 850MHz, the MSI card managed a run at 895MHz and 905MHz for selected tests in 3DMark2001 SE. This was all done with the reference cooling solution with the fan set at full tilt.

There is obviously something MSI has done, or the card came from a very good batch, but whatever it may be, the MSI card easily slots itself into the number one spot, making it the fastest graphics card ever reviewed – without a doubt. Some may find that their particular samples are not capable of reaching identical speeds; but at worst, it will reach 850MHz like all other 4870X2 cards, which is already pushing the limits of what the RV770 cores are capable of.

We would be willing to overlook everything else about the card, because nothing else can match the R4870X2 OC Edition when it's overclocked and powered by a relatively strong CPU. The MSI R4870X2 OC Edition is not only the fastest 4870X2 card we have tested, but the fastest card out of all to have ever arrived at the *NAG* offices. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

NAG HARDWARE

SPECS

CORE	2 x R700 (700MHz)
PROCESS	965 million gates (TSMC 55nm low-K)
MEMORY	2GB 512-bit GDDR5 (3.6GHz)
ROPS	32
SHADERS	800 (160 x 5-way SIMD) x 2
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1/ DirectX 10.1

SCORE

★★★★★

SAPPHIRE RADEON HD 4670

RRP→ R1,199 | **Supplier→** Axiz | **Website→** www.axiz.co.za | **Brand→** Sapphire

UPON RECEIVING THE 4670 to review, confusion hit me as to why *NAG* wanted me to review a key ring of all things. Further inspection led me to believe this was not just an ordinary key ring, but also a graphics card that had something to prove.

As you can gather from the intro, the first noticeable thing about the card is its size: it's small! This makes it perfect for small form-factor PCs and media centres where space is limited.

Adding to this, the 4670's power consumption of 50 to 60 watts allows it to draw power from the PCI-E slot, negating the need for external power, further emphasising the target market of this piece of hardware. The other major benefit of this low power consumption is that the card runs very cool. A low-profile cooler with a whisper-quiet fan is more than sufficient to keep this card stable, and will allow for some overclocking headroom.

Onto the numbers, shall we? Our test machine, consisting of an E8500 CPU and high-performance RAM running at 800MHz with 4-4-4-4 timings, gave us results of 8,113 in 3DMark06, and 3,732 in the performance test of 3DMark Vantage. These scores may seem low by today's high-end standards, but when looking at the price of the cards, the fact that they require no external power, and their size, they definitely perform adequately.

Looking at this performance, we can see that the 4670 is slightly slower than AMD's old mid-range card, the 3850. However, the benefits that the 4670 brings outweigh this many times over. Featuring DirectX 10.1, 7.1-channel LPCM output over HDMI and the like ensure that the 4670 can handle any media thrown at it.

For an HTPC, there is no better GPU than the 4670. It combines performance and features with size and manageability, and does what it claims to and more. As a gaming card for those on a budget, it offers adequate levels of performance at a reasonable price. **NAG**

Derrick Cramer

NAG HARDWARE

SPECS

CORE	RV730
PROCESS	55nm
CORE CLOCK	750MHz
MEMORY CLOCK	1,000MHz
MEMORY	512MB
PIPELINE	128-bit
ROPS	8
STREAM PROCESSORS	320
BANDWIDTH	32GB/sec

SCORE

★★★★★

The mouse wheel and mode-switching button change colour depending on the currently selected settings

NAG DREAM MACHINE

CYBER SNIPA STINGER

THE CYBER SNIPA STINGER'S feature list shares many similarities with Logitech's G5 and G9 gaming mice. Like the G9, the mouse is capable of sensitivity settings of up to 3,200dpi and like both the G5 and G9, the weight of the Stinger is customisable using weights that ship with the mouse. The standard mouse buttons are all here, along with back/forward buttons, a button for on-the-fly switching of sensitivity settings and a button for switching between user-created profiles (allowing you to switch between different macros for the mouse buttons, which are created in the Macro Manager, a utility included with the mouse drivers). The mouse wheel also moves to the left and right, allowing for sideways scrolling in documents and while browsing the Web. You're really here because you want to know how the mouse works in action though, and I'm happy to say that it performs quite nicely. Whether used for gaming or in other applications, the mouse is responsive and never suffers from sudden bouts of lag. I've come to appreciate the customisable weight systems most gaming mice nowadays seem to come bundled with, and the Stinger doesn't disappoint in this regard, allowing you to customise the mouse's weight to suit your play style. The drivers that are bundled with the mouse are easy to use and allow you to record the custom macros, customise sensitivity levels, change button settings and make general changes to the functionality of the mouse. The mouse is very comfortable to use and the button placement is well implemented, so you won't have any trouble reaching any of the buttons in a hurry. Rubber grips ensure that the mouse will never slip out of your grasp in heated battles (although how this is possible even without rubber grips is beyond me). The mouse has a funky, unique look with lots of LEDs, and should fit right in next to your flashy, modded case. The Stinger is a great gaming mouse and at such a good price, it's a steal. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

SPECS

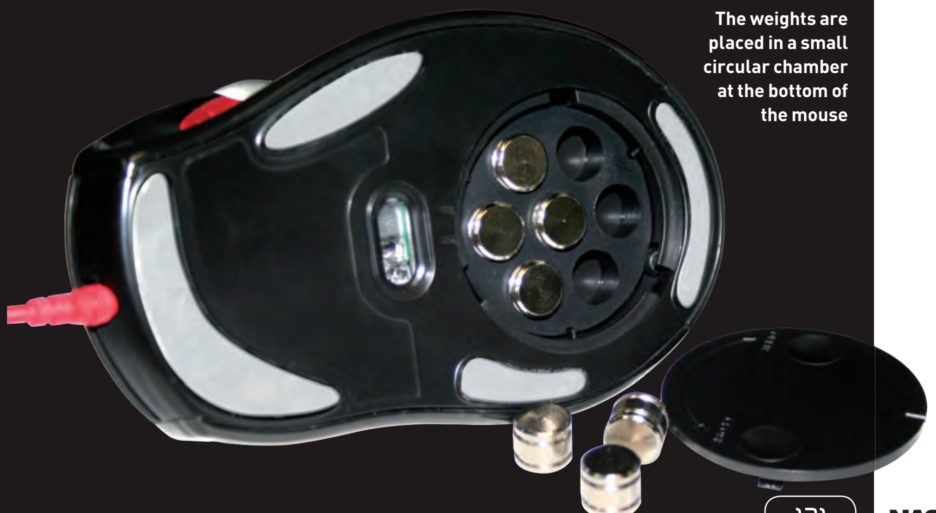
FPS	7,080
MAX DPI	3,200
TRACKING SPEED	45 inches per second
BUTTONS	Nine, including six programmable macro buttons
RESPONSE RATE	Up to 1ms adjustable
WEIGHTS	Seven removable (20g each)

SCORE

★★★★☆

RRP→ R399 | Supplier→ Axiz | Website→ www.axiz.co.za | Brand→ Cyber Snipa

The weights are placed in a small circular chamber at the bottom of the mouse



ASUS ENGTX280

RRP→ R6,999 | **Supplier→** ASUS
Website→ http://za.asus.com | **Brand→** ASUS

The well-designed cooling mechanism keeps both the fan speed and the temperatures low.

NOT ALL HAS BEEN well at NVIDIA lately. While PhysX has helped alleviate some of the pressures that AMD/ATI has been placing on the company, the news of a $200-million loss the company has suffered due to faulty GPUs has seen them lose some market share. Added to the price-fixing charges levelled at NVIDIA and AMD/ATI, not all seems to be going according to plan.

With fierce competition from AMD/ATI, NVIDIA has reacted appropriately by lowering the price of their high-end GTX 280 graphics processor. While it is still carries a slight price premium when compared to the competing 4870, it does perform better in general, runs cooler and quieter, and has PhysX support.

As it stands, the GTX 280 is less powerful than the 4870X2. There's no denying that the difference between these two graphics cards is sizeable, but then again, the GTX 280 uses less power, has better compatibility and has some impressive overclocking headroom. The ASUS ENGTX280 is an impressive performer out of the box, handling all games and tests thrown at it with ease. Moreover, with the core clock boosted to 700MHz (1,506MHz stream processor clock) and the memory clocked at 2.4GHz (1.2GHz SDR), the GTX 280 outperformed the 4870 at every turn.

With this overclock, the numbers we achieved during testing were impressive. It may not be the high frequencies that we see from GDDR5, but at 153GB/sec memory bandwidth, the GTX 280 is a very powerful card. Oddly enough, it is only when it is overclocked to these levels that it truly puts some distance between itself and the previous high-end 9800GX2.

The ENGTX280 offers cutting-edge performance, and with three such cards in three-way SLI on a 790-based motherboard, there is no title at any resolution the system won't be able to handle. While four-way CrossFireX works well with the 4870X2, when it comes to game performance, the three-way GTX 280 configuration wins every single test by a convincing margin. The GTX 280 may no longer be the fastest card on the market, but it probably is the easiest way to achieve this level of performance, as there are no multi-GPU scalability issues to deal with (such as those that have been experienced with the 9800GX2 and 4870X2 GPUs). The ENGTX280 is a great card and is well worth the purchase. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

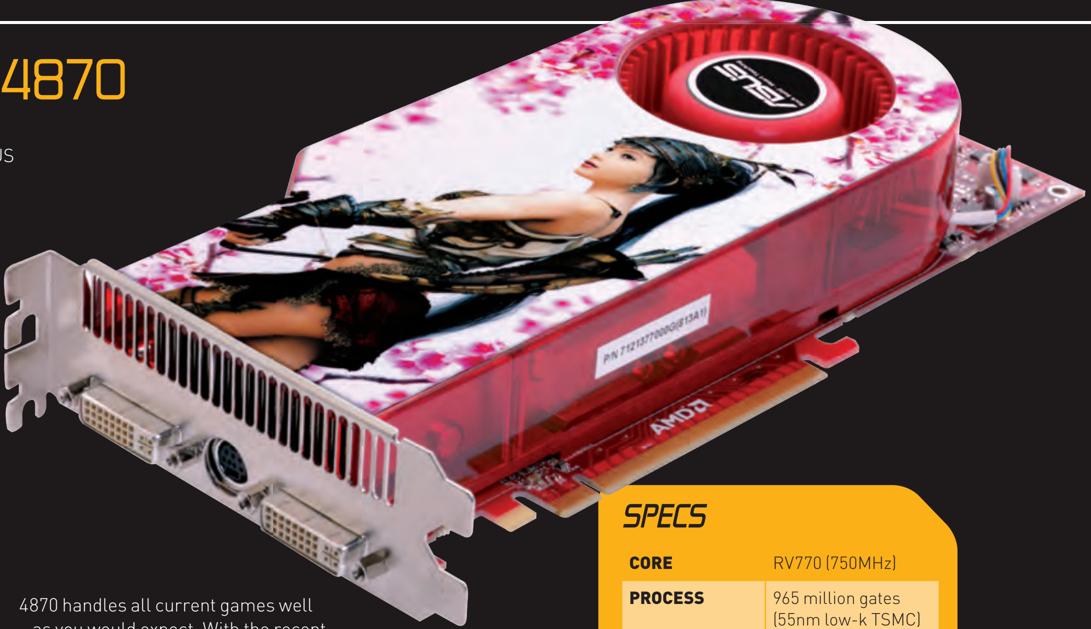
CORE	GT200
PROCESS	1.4 billion gates (TSMC 65nm)
MEMORY	512-bit GDDR3 (2.21GHz)
ROPS	32
STREAM PROCESSORS	240
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1/ DirectX 10

SCORE

★★★★☆

ASUS RADEON 4870

RRP→ R4,499 | **Supplier→** ASUS
Website→ http://za.asus.com | **Brand→** ASUS



IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR an upgrade for last generation's 3870 or GeForce 9800 series, the choice is simple and obvious. The Radeon 4870 offers incredible performance but comes in at a very reasonable price. It may not have PhysX support currently, but if you already own a GeForce 8 or newer graphics card, you should be able to use both in the same system and benefit from the graphics power of the 4870, while making use of hardware accelerated physics available on the NVIDIA GPUs.

The ASUS model is what you would expect, featuring the standard PCB, cooling mechanism and the obligatory custom artwork on the cooler itself. Nothing out of the ordinary, but with such a graphics card not much needs to be done by ASUS. There's a TOP model of this same card that has a specially unlocked BIOS that allows clock speeds in excess of 900MHz to be used via the Catalyst Control Center; and if you're an enthusiast looking for top scores or want to play a specific game at a slightly higher resolution, the TOP BIOS or card itself may be worth looking at.

Given that most 4870 graphics cards are the same, ASUS has done a great job by including *Alone in the Dark* with the graphics card, which is better than *Company of Heroes*, which was getting a bit old. In terms of performance, the Radeon 4870 handles all current games well – as you would expect. With the recent release of Catalyst 8.9, the performance of *Crysis* has improved and so has synthetic performance in benchmarks.

There isn't much to fault the Radeon 4870 on. It has a better fan profile than other 4870 cards (keeping it cooler), it overclocks well and features a recent game. If a 4870 is what you are looking for, the ASUS Radeon 4870 would be a worthwhile consideration, as the card provides solid performance out of the box at what should be a fairly reasonable price. In keeping it simple, ASUS has done well with the Radeon 4870. **NAG**

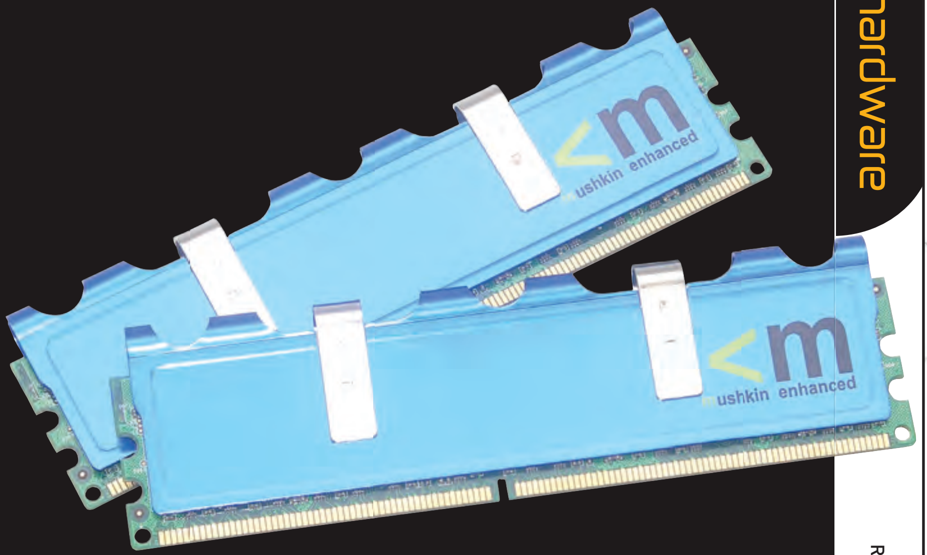
Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CORE	RV770 (750MHz)
PROCESS	965 million gates (55nm low-k TSMC)
MEMORY	512-bit GDDR5 (3.6GHz)
ROPS	16
SHADERS	800 (160 x five-way SIMD)
API SUPPORT	OpenGL 2.1/ DirectX 10.1

SCORE

★★★★☆



MUSHKIN XP2-6400 DDR2 (4GB)

RRP→ R890 | **Supplier→** The Prophecy Shop | **Website→** www.prophecy.co.za | **Brand→** Mushkin

IF YOU HAVEN'T HEARD about it or seen it online or elsewhere, DDR2 memory prices have dropped dramatically. While DDR3 prices have come down as well, the truth remains that for the price of a dual-channel performance DDR3 set you can get up to 8GB of DDR2. The Mushkin set we have here is an example of the great value DDR2 presents. While it is true that Intel is moving away from DDR2, there are still many motherboards based on the LGA775 platform and from AMD that support DDR2.

Four gigabytes of RAM may seem excessive, but with recent games utilising up to 3GB of main memory during play, it is obvious that one can never have too much RAM. Even with the limitations or 32-bit operating systems, we are able to take advantage of 4GB of RAM, minimising thrashing and load times in our games and benchmarks.

Windows Vista is not only faster with 4GB of RAM, but it also takes better advantage of the resources (the same doesn't always apply to Windows XP). During testing, we saw slightly higher frame rates - in particular when dealing with Vista 64-bit in the game benchmarks.

While 4GB may seem to be a stretch for some people and others may be concerned about losing memory performance, the Mushkin set runs reliably at CL4-4-4-12 2T at 2.1V at the standard 800MHz. Should you want better performance, the set can reache an impressive 500MHz CL4-4-4-12 at 2.25V. While there are some DDR2 sets that can clock all the way to 700MHz at CL5, they are usually 2GB sets and achieve those speeds at very high voltages in excess of 2.6V which is obviously not suitable for everyday use.

The Mushkin XP2-6400 4GB set is a compromise of sorts. It allows you to run a relatively high clock on the motherboard (500MHz), while retaining a 1:1 speed ratio at very good timings. With loosened timings, we were able to add a good 50MHz to the clock with the RAM topping out at 1,100MHz. However, some may prefer the tighter timings at the lower speed than the theoretically higher bandwidth, especially considering that running a 550MHz FSB is not practical for most people. We were unable to test two of these sets for a combined total of 8GB of memory, but we have no doubt that with a slight voltage boost, 800MHz CL 4-4-4-12 2T should be fine (provided that the motherboard memory controller can handle such a configuration).

The Mushkin XP2-6400 4GB set is not for the enthusiast, but more for the power user or gamer looking to minimise load times and improve system performance without compromising RAM speed. The price is great and the sticks look good. One may be able to buy cheaper generic sets, but they certainly will not have the same performance, the same warranty or provide as much compatibility. If you're still using a DDR2 platform, the Mushkin XP2-6400 4GB set may be the cheapest and fastest way to boost your computer's performance. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko

SPECS

CHIPSET	Micron D9X
RATED SPEED	DDR2 800MHz (PC2-6400)
TIMINGS	4-4-4-12
VOLTAGE	2.1V

SCORE

★★★★☆

BIG HERO 6 #1 (OF 5)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Marvel
Writers: Claremont / Nakayama
Artist: Terry Pallot
Price: R37.50

BIG HERO 6 IS a government-run, Japanese superhero team assigned to defend the country from any threats that may arise - be they internal or external. Ever mindful of the destructive force of nuclear weapons, the Japanese vowed never to use them and sought to find another way to defend themselves; and thus embraced the super-powered beings amongst their citizens, choosing to harness their power for the good of the country, rather than persecuting or forcing them to stand against the regular humans. And so the team was born. In this miniseries, the group of heroes returns to the comic pages with a new look and a few new members, and a threat to the world in which they find themselves standing against. The comic has a light, easy-to-read feel to it, and an obvious manga style flair to its characters and artwork. This new miniseries of *Big Hero 6* is a fresh new addition to the Marvel Universe.

Clive Burmeister

HERE'S A PRESENT, BRUTE.
I'VE SOFTENED HER UP. LET'S SEE YOU FINISH THE JOB.
WITH PLEASURE.
WHAT MAKES YOU TWO SLAGS THINK HE'LL BE ANY BETTER AT IT...
...THAN YOU WERE?

SOLOMON KANE #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Dark Horse
Writer: Scott Allie
Artist: Mario Guevara
Price: R28.95

SOLOMON KANE, CREATED BY Robert E. Howard (creator of *Conan*), is a dark story of a seventeenth-century puritan who wanders the world "to ease various evil mean of their lives." [*sic*] As Kane travels through Germany, he encounters a band of rogues whom he dispatches with the grace and effortlessness of a born killer. His encounters lead him to a mystery in the land surrounding the Baron of the lands, and the rumours about his home, known by the locals as the Castle of the Devil. The story of *Solomon Kane* dates back to the 1920s when Howard presented his characters in various pulp magazines. The character itself, a grim fanatic, obsessed with eradicating evil, is rather appealing as a hero for a horror adventure, simply because he is not quite a hero, but rather a man with work to do. With a lot to live up to, the team of Scott Allie and Mario Guevara deliver a compelling first issue, with all the spirit of the original, but with a new tale of intrigue, as well as a balanced combination of gruesome artwork and very particular writing, which captures the personality of Kane perfectly.

Clive Burmeister

YOU GO TO YOUR MAKER WITH A CURSE ON YOUR LIPS, HESSIAN.
AS WORTHY AN EPITAPH FOR YOU AS RAUBER, OR STRAUCHDIEB...

X-FORCE 2008 #5

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writers: Craig Kyle, Christopher Yost
Artist: Clayton Crain
Price: R31

THE X-FORCE TEAM, ORIGINALLY created in 1989 by artist Rob Liefield and led by the pistol-wielding mutant Cable, has travelled a rocky road to get to where it is now. Cancelled and re-imagined no less than five times, the series goes from strength to strength with each new volume. This, the latest volume, features the team battling it out against Reverend Stryker's final curse on the world: The Purifiers.

Under the leadership of Wolverine, X-Force must fight against Reverend Mathew Craig and his diabolical plans to turn Angel's DNA into a weapon of righteous war. Written by Craig Kyle (*Ultimate Avengers, X-Men: Evolution*) and Christopher Yost (*X-Men: Evolution*), with artwork by Clayton Crain, the series is filled with dark, poetic dialogue and narrative, which combine well with Crain's incredibly detailed and emotional artwork. The story is intense and compelling, adding another layer to the rich *X-Men* brand that we all know so well. Definitely aimed at fans of the series and those looking to see some familiar faces, *X-Force* is a must-read for anyone looking to explore the darker side of the *X-Men* legacy.

Geoff Burrows

SAFEGUARDING THE ORACLE WAS ONLY ONE OF THE TWO MISSIONS GIVEN TO ME BY REVEREND STRYKER...
MAKE IT STOP!!

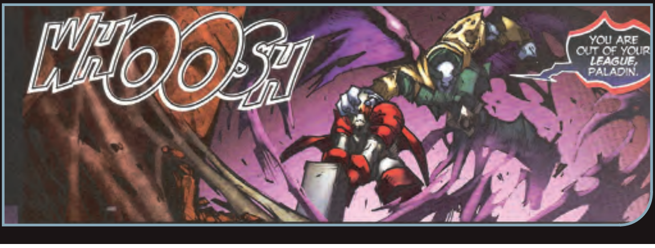
"...OUR DESTINY AWAITS."

WORLD OF WARCRAFT: ASHBRINGER #1 (OF 4)

Format: Comic Miniseries
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writer: Micky Neilson
Artists: Lullabi / Washington
Price: R36.50

WAR HAS AGAIN COME to Azeroth, as the evil undead Horde forces known as The Scourge invade the human lands, sowing death and destruction. The humans struggle to face this new foe, when even their own rise against them, and soon territory after territory falls to The Scourge. But Alexandros Morgaine of the Order of the Silver Hand decides to enlist the aid of their dwarf allies in forging a weapon to fight the undead. Using a mystical orb recovered in the last war with the orcs, the dwarf King Magni forges a blade of incomparable power, pouring all his rage and thirst for vengeance into the weapon. But are a few paladins and a special sword enough to save the human lands, or is it already too late? *Ashbringer* is a new story by Wildstorm for the *World of Warcraft* comic line, based on the incredibly popular game. And it lives up to its influences and sources of inspiration, with its action-packed story, electrifying artwork, and writing that puts you right in the thick of battle. Even if, by some small chance, you're new to the *World of Warcraft* phenomenon, *Ashbringer* is easy to get into, showing you what you've been missing.

Clive Burmeister



UNCANNY X-MEN: DIVIDED WE STAND

Format: Graphic Novel
Publisher: Marvel
Writer: Ed Brubaker
Artist: Various
Price: R124.95

THE LIVES OF THE X-Men have become tremulous of late, with the disastrous events that took place in the *Messiah Complex*, when Bishop went rogue, and in an attempt to kill the first mutant baby born since M-Day, shot Professor Xavier in the head. With the fate of Charles Xavier looking bleak, Cyclops announces the end of the X-Men. *Divided We Stand* picks up from there, following the various characters as they try to recover from the ordeal, only to face new threats as they struggle to find their feet without the leadership of Professor X. *Divided We Stand* features good writing and story telling along with great artwork - it's everything we've come to expect from an X-Men book.

Clive Burmeister

DANGER GIRL BODY SHOTS #1

Format: Comic Series
Publisher: Wildstorm
Writer: Andy Hartnell
Artists: Nick Bradshaw, Jim Charalampiois
Price: R28

COMIC SERIES SUCH AS *Danger Girl* exist to serve a few very particular purposes: to look good and entertain, while making sure they don't take themselves too seriously in the process. The *Danger Girl* series, originally created by breast-obsessed J. Scott Campbell and Andy Hartnell, spans multiple miniseries, each featuring common characters, but with different settings and plot arcs. In this series, *Body Shots*, the Danger Girls are tasked with recovering a potential doomsday device: this usually involves lots of crazy action scenes, seductive poses and innuendo aplenty.

While most of the *Danger Girl* series is, to be honest, pretty trashy, it does a stellar job at poking fun at super-spy lore, especially *James Bond* and *Charlie's Angels*. The series is fun, bubbly and looks good. Bradshaw's pencilling is crisp and generates exciting action scenes, complemented by Charalampiois's attentive colour work and stylish, funky palette. Worth a read if you're on the lookout to expand your *Danger Girl* collection or even explore it for the first time, but best avoided if you expect a little more depth.

Geoff Burrows

KRKK
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ZNNG
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ZNNG
PMFFT
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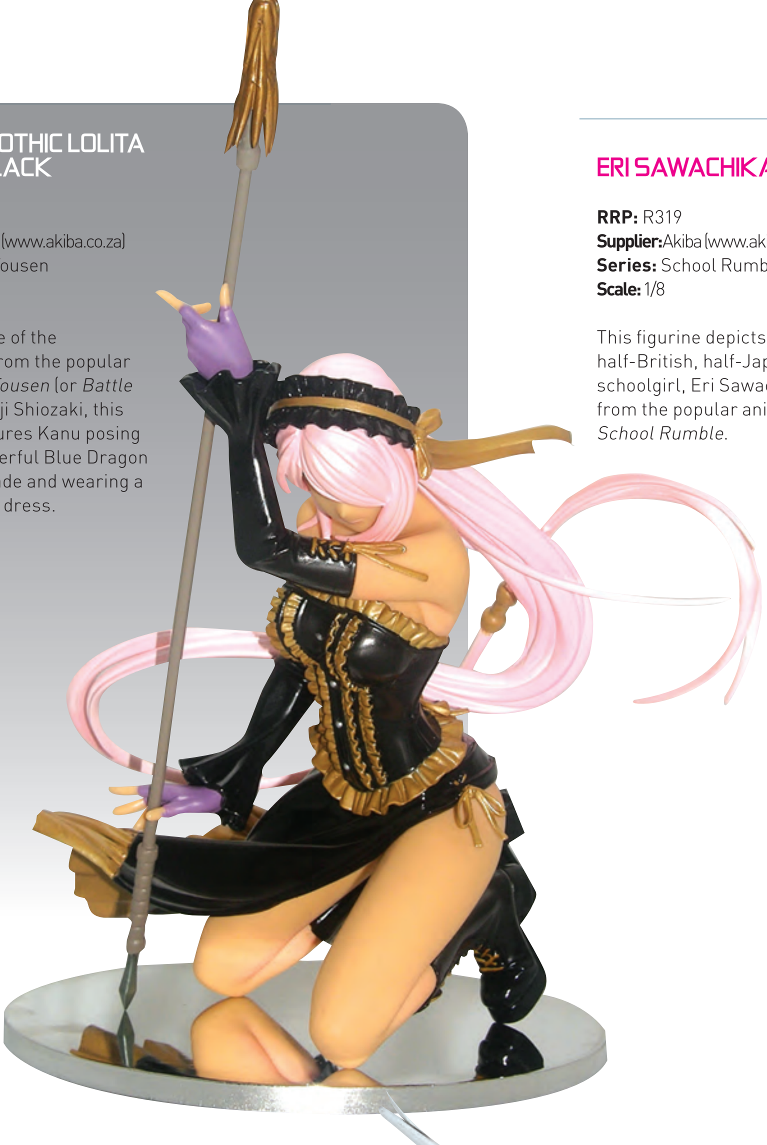
KRKK
VRRP
YOU BETTER BUCKLE UP FOR SAFETY, NAOKI.
KPOW KPOW KPOW
KPOW KPOW
I CAN'T HAVE YOU DROPPING OUT OF OUR DEAL.



KANU - GOTHIC LOLITA DRESS BLACK

RRP: R479
Supplier: Akiba (www.akiba.co.za)
Series: Ikki Tousen
Scale: 1/7

Based on one of the characters from the popular manga *Ikki Tousen* (or *Battle Vixens*) by Yuji Shiozaki, this figurine features Kanu posing with the powerful Blue Dragon Crescent Blade and wearing a Gothic Lolita dress.

ERI SAWACHIKA

RRP: R319
Supplier: Akiba (www.akiba.co.za)
Series: School Rumble
Scale: 1/8

This figurine depicts the half-British, half-Japanese schoolgirl, Eri Sawachika, from the popular anime/manga *School Rumble*.

WINGS OF REDEMPTION AND PIRATE SPAWN

RRP: R150.00 each
Supplier: Oracle Comics & Trading Cards (www.oraclecomics.co.za)
Series: Spawn Classics

The *Wings of Redemption* figurine comes with removable wings and a stand, while *Pirate Spawn*'s hat, sword and guns are all removable. These are just two of the figurines in the Spawn Classics range, with the remaining two being *Poacher* and *Manga Spawn*.

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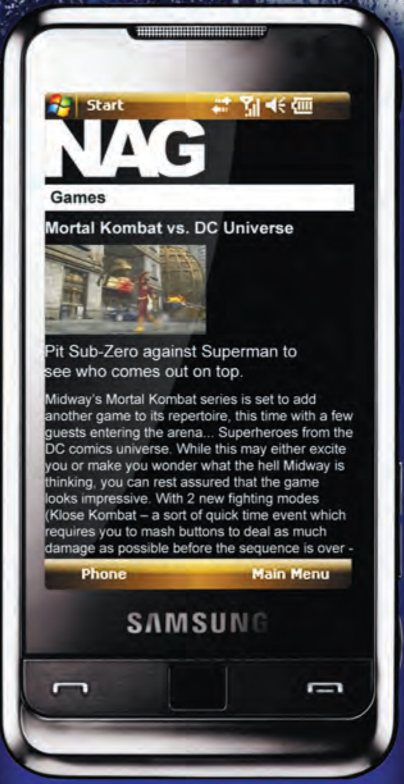

Games

Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe

Pit Sub-Zero against Superman to see who comes out on top.

Midway's Mortal Kombat series is set to add another game to its repertoire, this time with a few guests entering the arena... Superheroes from the DC comics universe. While this may either excite you or make you wonder what the hell Midway is thinking, you can rest assured that the game looks impressive. With 2 new fighting modes (Klose Kombat – a sort of quick time event which requires you to mash buttons to deal as much damage as possible before the sequence is over -

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WORLD OF WARCRAFT: THE ADVENTURE GAME

CAN YOU SPELL ‘CASH cow’? How about ‘milking’? Yes, *World of Warcraft* has certainly been a moderately profitable franchise for Blizzard Entertainment, and it seems that the company is not content to rest on its digital laurels, but is rather intent on merchandising spin-offs. And, I suppose they can’t be blamed. This particular one is the fourth (from what we’ve been able to dig up) *WoW*-based board game to date, the previous being *World of Warcraft: The Board Game* and its two expansion packs. Oh yes, before I forget: this new one also seems quite ‘expandable’…

This game makes a good attempt at mirroring *WoW*’s adventure-centric nature, and its options regarding PvP (player vs. player) and PvE (player vs. enemy) combat. Basically, players compete with each other to be the first to accumulate a certain number of ‘valor points’. There are many ways to skin a cat - as they say - in this game. How you go about accumulating these points, for instance, depends partly on your tastes and style, though is also influenced by in-game circumstances. For example, you can focus on receiving and completing quests, you can go after powerful, high-profile bad guys, and you can collect lots of loot from fallen monsters and trade it for bling… Your approach to other players’ characters is also up to you. You can choose to not get involved, minding your own business and focusing on racing to your goal; or you can try to interfere with your opponents, either confrontationally or more indirectly.

The game uses a clever mechanism of double-sided cards, allowing more information to be conveyed with less paper – and that’s a blessing, as there is already a huge multitude of cards and tokens! (The latter are used to mark things, either on the board or on cards.) Overall, trying to describe the game’s mechanics here is impossible. Suffice it to say, there are four characters to choose from, each with its own stats and abilities, and each has four possible levels and two aspects. Most areas on the board, as well as most encounters and most items, are level restricted, so can only be entered, faced, or used, by characters of the same level or higher.

On the downside, one major criticism I have about this game is its packaging. At first blush, everything is of high quality and well produced. However, after the first game, it becomes apparent that there has been one major oversight: the box doesn’t contain any compartments for the various, and very numerous, game props to be packed into, so each new game will involve a significant period of sorting and separating first. Some will also complain that the rules are a bit convoluted, but this is relative. For the most part, except for a couple of slight ambiguities, the rules are pretty clear, and quite well written. Those interested in playing this game should merely go through the rules first, then keep the manual at hand – by the end of the first game, it should all become clear! **NAG**

Alex Jelagin

RRP→ R495 | **Publisher→** Fantasy Flight Games | **Distributor→** www.awx.co.za | **Genre→** Fantasy-themed Board Game | **Age Rating→** A

Bottom Line

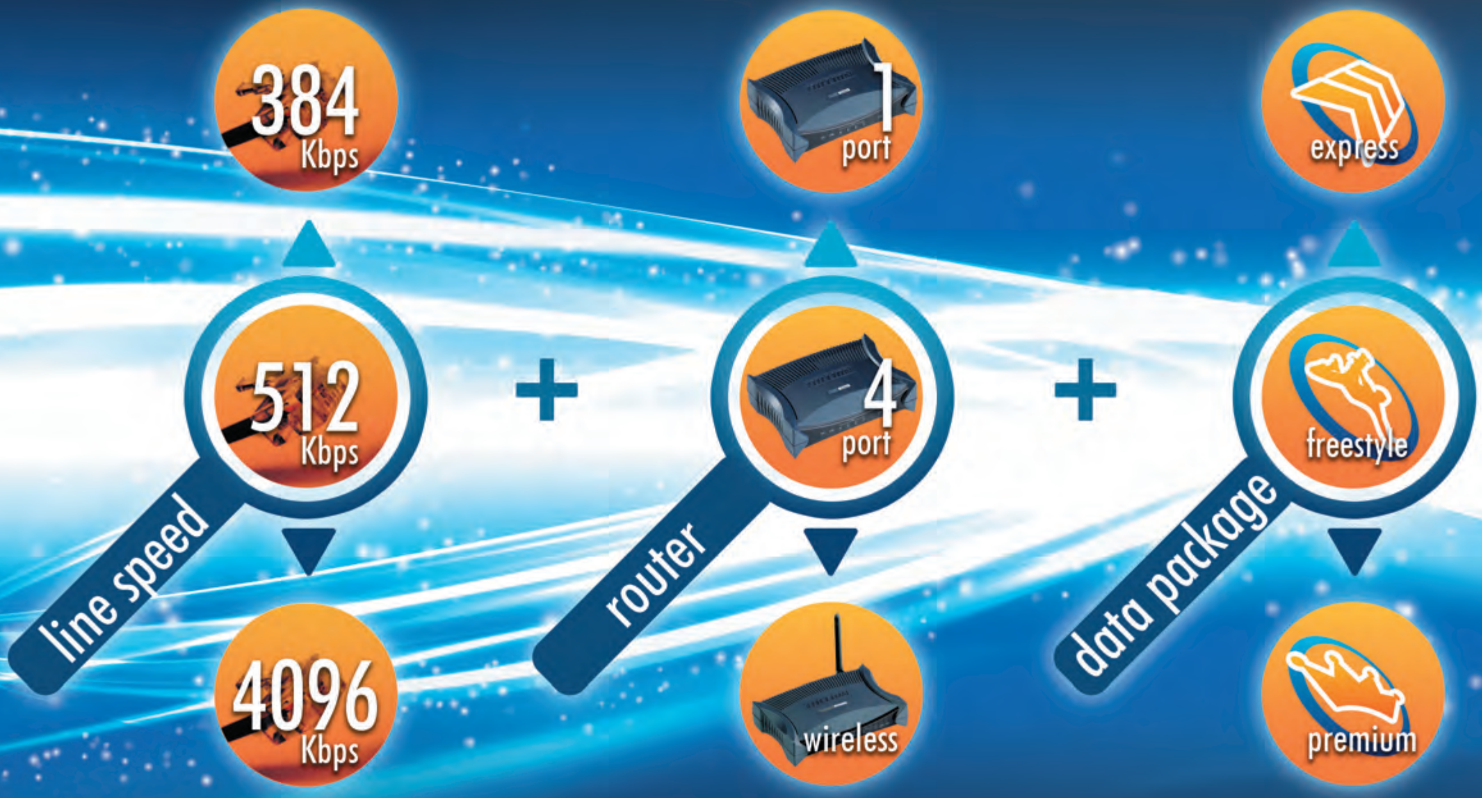
A fairly complex board game that mirrors the nature of the MMORPG.

74

OUT OF 100

online?

many choices...



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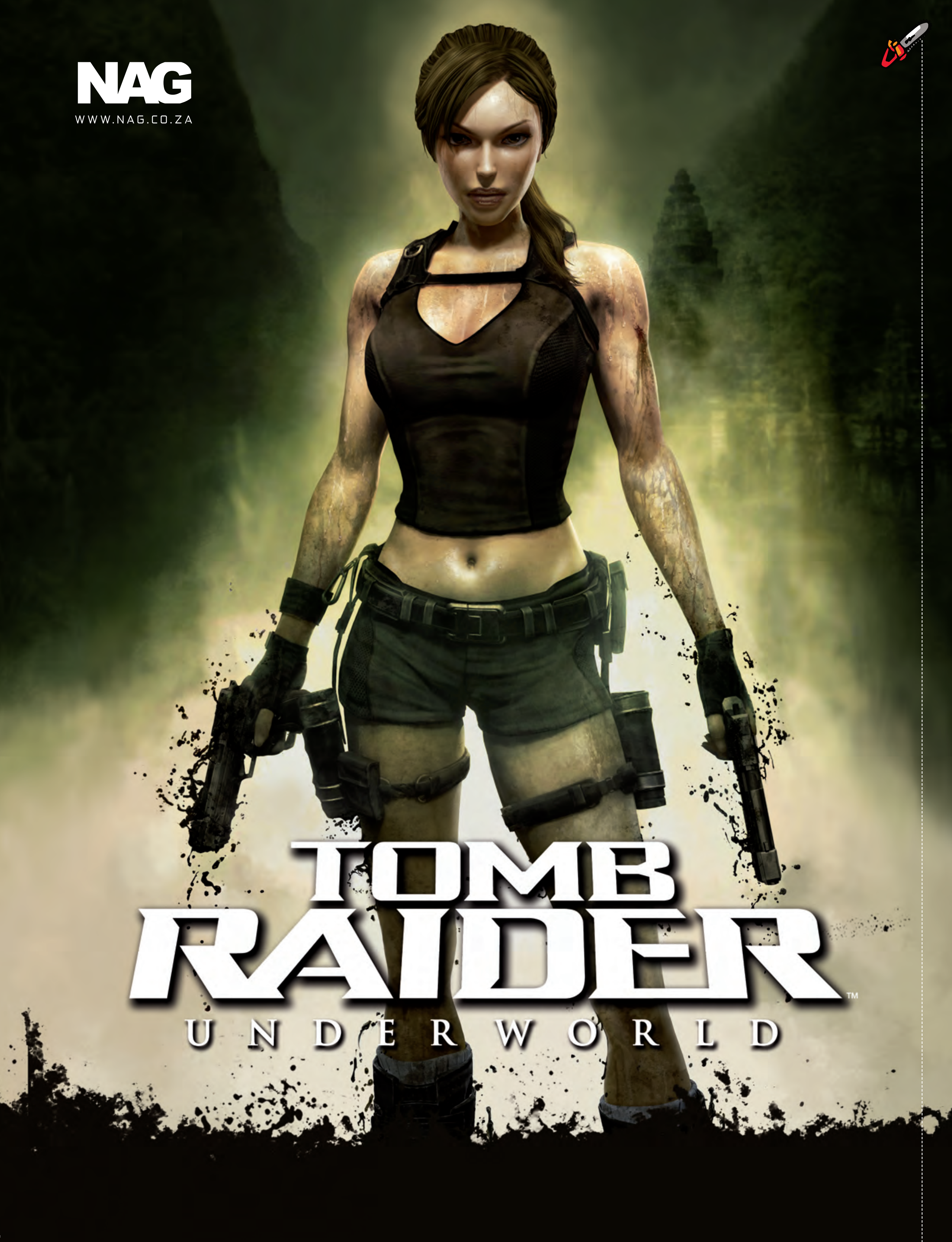
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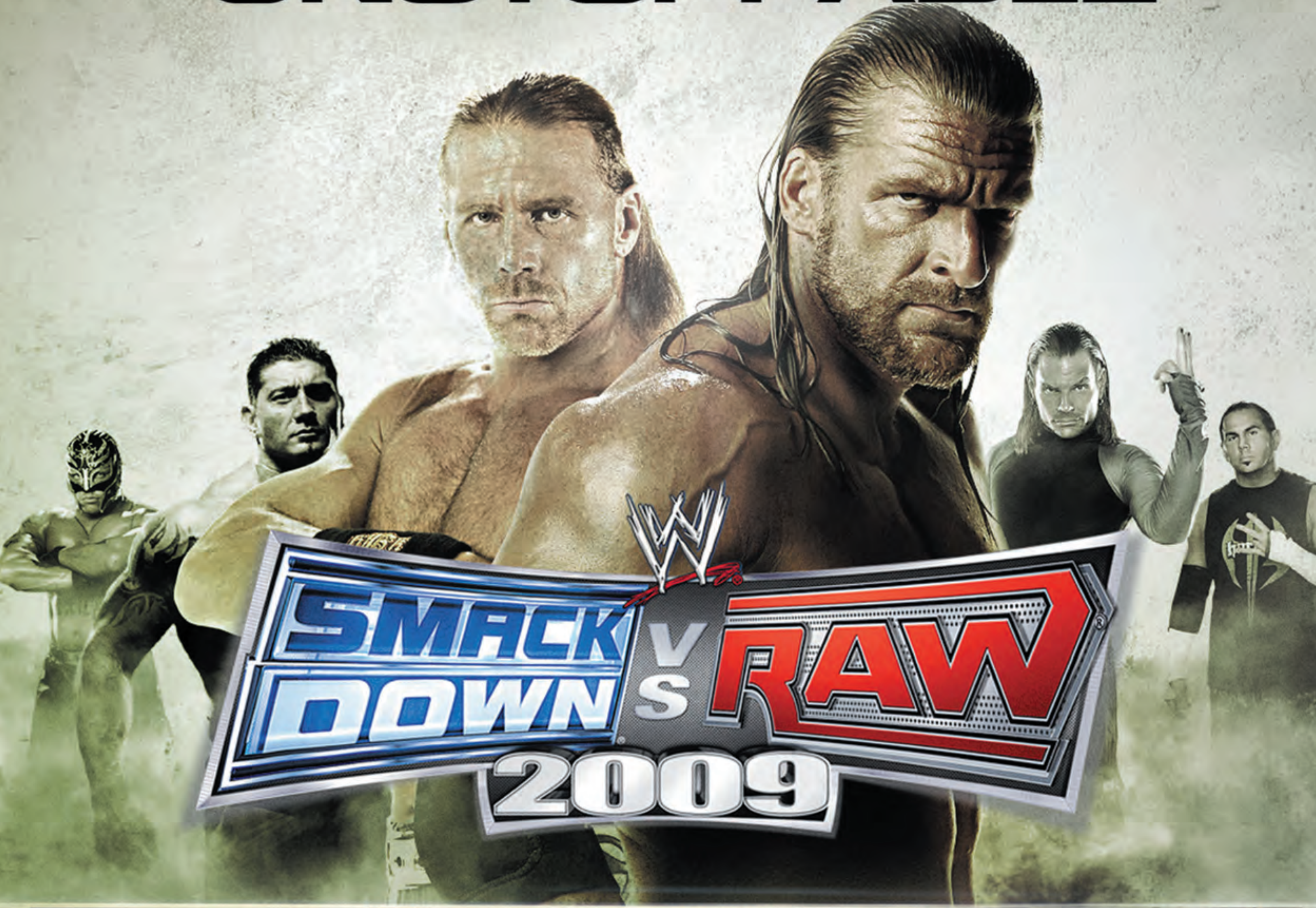

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Dimensions	185 x 410 x 480 mm (W x H x D)
Colors	Silver / Metallic gray / Black
Side panel	Intel CAG 1.1 fan duct
Material	Aluminum + Steel mesh + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 6 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2

1020

Model no.	GZ-AX2CBS-SNS / SNG / SNB
Dimensions	185 x 410 x 480 mm (W x H x D
Colors	Silver / Metallic gray / Black
Side panel	Intel CAG 1.1 fan duct
Material	Aluminum + SECC
Drive bays	5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 1 (External) 3.5" x 5 (Internal)
Form factor	ATX / Micro ATX
I/O ports	USB x 2, 1394 x 1, HD+AC'97 x 1
Fans	12cm silent x 2

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